Pluralism or Relativism?

Critical Review

An Interdisciplinary Journal *of* Politics *and* Society

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Jeffrey Friedman

INTRODUCTION: PLURALISM OR RELATIVISM?

The vogue for value pluralism is a sign not only of the unease generated by the triumph of liberalism, but of the definitiveness of that triumph. Value pluralism is, at least in the work of such writers as John Gray, supposed to be a challenge to liberalism; but it is the value pluralism secreted in liberalism that is, in fact, the aspect of liberalism responsible for the widespread suspicion of the superficiality and even incoherence of the reigning doctrine of our age. Thus, even those value pluralists, such as Gray, who boldly attempt to dethrone the core liberal value, equal individual freedom, from its paramount position in modern political thought end up reproducing the structural feature of liberalism that makes freedom such a dubious totem in the first place.

As Daniel Weinstock shows below, Gray's attack on liberal freedom goes astray when it takes the communitarian form of denying that individuals choose their ways of life from among incommensurable possibilities, as Isaiah Berlin held. The reality, Gray contends, is that incommensurable values are embodied in collective identities that are not chosen but inherited. So, rather than insisting on (negative) freedom—individual freedom of choice—as the upshot of value pluralism, as Berlin did, Gray holds that genuine value pluralism may sanction nonliberal or illiberal cultural identities.

In Gray's thought we have what is hinted at but never delivered in the work of such communitarian theorists as Charles Taylor, Michael

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Sandel, Michael Walzer, and Alasdair MacIntyre: a pluralism between communities that eschews universalist value judgments that could justify interfering with the freedom of one culture or another to go its own way. Taylor, Sandel, Walzer, and MacIntyre strive to avoid this denouement because their communitarianisms are designed to secure the liberal goal, equal individual freedom, from what they see as the corrosive threat posed to it by the individualistic conceptions of it endemic in contemporary liberalism. Accordingly, they back away from communitarianism whenever it threatens to legitimize all communities, even those that subject their members to unequal freedom. Gray's communitarianism, by contrast, is pure and relatively uncomplicated, because for Gray, pluralism, not individual freedom, is the starting point. So he has no compunctions against drawing the obvious conclusion from the communitarian critique of individual value choice: namely, that whatever the community values is, *ipso facto*, valuable.

To be sure, Gray denies that his view amounts to value relativism; but his portrayal of communal ways of life as embodying incommensurate yet equally legitimate values reproduces relativism in everything but name. To deny that any one value, with its corresponding ways of life, is superior to others is to relativize all of the values in question. Gray attempts to escape this conclusion by treating one set of incommensurable values as objective, in contrast to other values that are subjective, and that may therefore be overridden by values of the first type. But Gray's constrained pluralism remains relativistic with respect to the "objective" values.

It is just this relativism that all communitarians implicitly share with liberals. The difference between the two camps is that liberals relativize not the values of plural communities, but those of plural individuals. To present value pluralism as an *alternative* to liberalism is to misconstrue both liberalism and pluralism.

Weinstock himself, however, accepts Gray's dichotomy of liberalism and pluralism. Like Berlin and most other liberals, he depicts equal individual freedom as an objective value that trumps all competitors and distinguishes liberalism from pluralism.

What is equal individual freedom, though, if not the ability of each individual to pursue ends she has chosen from among a plurality of options that are indistinguishable in their merit? (If the options could be ranked by merit, why would it be valuable to be able to choose the lesser among them?) This ability might, it is true, be justified

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monistically. That is, it might be seen as conducive in the long run to *the* objective good even though, in the short run, it opens the door to choices of ends that are only putatively good. Such a defense of freedom would have to be instrumentalist and, therefore, contingent. Freedom would, in this view, be good only if and to the extent that, as a matter of fact, it produced more of the good than directly mandating the good would produce. For instance, if happiness is the good, freedom would be warranted if free people were happier than unfree people, even though their freedom would allow people to pursue bad ends or mistaken conceptions of the good end, happiness. Letting people do what makes them unhappy might be justified because real-world governments are, for empirical reasons, incapable of making them any happier.

But Weinstock follows Berlin in eschewing the instrumentalist approach; he prefers to defend freedom as good in itself. Combined with the monistic view that some of the choices free people make are bad and others, good, a defense of freedom as good in itself would entail that somehow it is bad to prohibit people from doing what is bad, and that somehow it is not good to force them to do what is good. But it verges on contradiction to contend that it is bad to prohibit the bad or enforce the good, since the bad is what should not happen, and prohibiting it (in theory) keeps it from happening; while the good is what should happen, and enforcing it (in theory) makes it happen. Typically, liberals obscure the prima facie difficulties with this position by creating a new category, "rights," which they suppose trump the good. This issues in the paradoxical "right to do what is wrong" (cf. Waldron 1993). Berlin, however, eschews this strategy. In proclaiming what Gray calls the "fact" of value pluralism, Berlin turned the right to do what is wrong into a right to choose from among a list of ends that are indistinguishably right. It is as if he thought that the best way to defend the intrinsic value of freedom is to deny that the ends among which people freely choose can be sorted into good and bad options to begin with. (Of course, this is not what he thought: he was convinced of the "fact" of value pluralism on independent grounds.)

Value pluralism is a step forward in the logic of liberalism; at least superficially, it avoids the paradox of a right to do what is wrong. But it also brings liberalism to the brink of relativistic incoherence. For if the choices facing an individual are truly equal in value, how could she conceivably decide among them? Random choice is not free choice: it substitutes the action of a coin toss for that of the will. And

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if the choice among plural ends is simply random or arbitrary, then why is the freedom to make this choice so very important? Declaring freedom of choice among plural ends to be an objective value (let alone the highest objective value) merely drapes the mantle of objectivity over Berlin's subjectivization of the good, dressing up individual whim as the highest end.

There is something about freedom that makes it uniquely unsuitable as an objective value: namely, the fact that freedom is the ability to choose *among* possible objective values. If freedom is intrinsically valuable, whatever value is freely chosen must be intrinsically valuable if we are to avoid a "right to do wrong." Regardless of whether this is because each of the choices on the menu is as indistinguishably good as the others, ex ante, or because one's choice of a menu item *makes* it intrinsically good, ex post, the ramifications are doubly incoherent. First, contradictory value choices now seem to be legitimate, whether because they are somehow judged equally valuable on pluralist grounds or because they are rendered good by being chosen by different choosers, or by the same chooser at different times. Second and not unrelated, each chooser finds herself in the position of being unable to motivate her choice rationally, since all of the options seem to have an equal claim on her allegiance. If every option is equally good, or if it becomes good by virtue of her choosing it, then how is she to choose?

In practice, if not in theory, liberal individualists admit that no rational criterion for choosing among plural goods would be consistent with their perspective. Such a criterion would render some goods better than others, and the latter would become, comparatively speaking, bads. This, in turn, would seem to license coercive action against the choice of the bad, at least in theory. Thus, individual choice must be seen not as rationally motivated, but as caused by uncriticizable "preferences"; in liberal societies, then, every individual action tends to be depicted, not as having been chosen by a free will, but as the product of prerational determination. Everything becomes a matter of taste, and the only "absolute" that remains is freedom to do whatever conforms to one's tastes (as long as this doesn't violate others' equal right to do what they find appealing). Liberal philosophers who are uncomfortable with this trivialization of values have no alternative but to shift to other, equally deterministic portayals of individual choice, such as those that uncritically accept as dispositive the values that "we" take to be good. Whether justified by value pluralism or by

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claims about the objective value of freedom, then, modern liberalism tends to diminish freedom of the will to the vanishing point, substituting for it the only thing that could motivate a nonrational action: determination, whether by uncriticizable tastes or uncriticizable cultural inheritances.

Communitarianism simply takes the next logical step by *theorizing* the unfree will. One's actions are, in the communitarian view, prerationally determined by one's collective identity. In the hands of the liberal communitarians, however, as in the hands of more conventional liberals, the denial of individual freedom of the will achieves the paradoxical purpose of defending individual freedom of action. Think of MacIntyre's apotheosis of the Homeric hero (MacIntyre 1984, passim) and the Thomistic chooser (MacIntyre 1988, 339–40), who are (according to MacIntyre) so tightly hemmed in by communal identity that they do not even experience it as a constraint, for they do not see their actions as originating in free will in the first place. Only when collective "practices" have socialized individuals to this point, MacIntyre believes, will it be possible for people to act in concert without coercing or manipulating each other—as liberal individuals must do; for only then will they be animated by a set of shared rather than antagonistic ends. The hypersocialized individual who is drawn ineluctably to the community's view of the good supplants the atomistic individual who is unable to choose among goods except arbitrarily, let alone being able to justify this choice to other free wills. But the reason to prefer the hypersocialized individual is that only she is capable of equal freedom.

This explains why the liberal communitarian is willing to court the relativism inherent in the notion that a community's values should be considered valuable merely by virtue of their acceptance in that community. For the liberal communitarian, this is a risk worth taking, because treating communally shared values *as if* they are really valuable will make possible, at last, a society of equal individual freedom. Value pluralism is, here, a stratagem in the service of liberty. Berlin's pluralism was not so very different. This is not to deny either that the liberal communitarians' conception of freedom, being "positive," is different from Berlin's; or that Berlin genuinely believed in the pluralism of values. But Berlin believed even more strongly in the intrinsic value of freedom, which would have required him to accept something like value pluralism even if he were not independently convinced of it.

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Gray, in contrast, starts from a belief in value pluralism and drops Berlin's commitment to individual freedom. Yet the result is a picture of values that is as relativistic, hence as incapable of arbitrating among values, hence as deterministic in its depiction of how values are actually chosen, as is either liberal individualism or liberal communitarianism.

One must question, then, what is accomplished by Gray's radicalization of Berlin. All it produces is a shift in the locus of arbitrary "choice" from the individual to the community. In turn, however, attempting to fend off Gray by returning to Berlin and hoisting one value, freedom, above the relativistic fray cannot mitigate the incoherence of Berlin's account, which stems from pluralism itself. Pluralism is what precludes rationality in the choice of ends and can therefore motivate such choices only through their arbitrary determination. The fundamental incoherence involved in defending one's right to pursue an end that is no better than the alternatives—the fundamental relativism of pluralism—is not altered by calling the freedom to pursue such an end "objectively good," any more than Gray's version of pluralism would shed its relativistic and deterministic aspects if he were to dignify the communal determination of ends as "objectively good." What is at issue between Gray and Berlin is merely whether the arbitrarily determined selector of ends is the individual or the "community," and neither of these options produces a coherent account of why the resulting selection is valid.

The problem with the relativism attendant on value pluralism is not so much that it means that "anything goes," but that it renders unintelligible what is, in fact, inescapable for human beings: our possession of free will. Free will presupposes non-arbitrary criteria of choice, lest it collapse into unfree determination. Without a putatively objective criterion of the good to govern our free choices, we would be unable to decide between the options before us. This is exactly the position we wind up in if we claim to recognize the "fact" of pluralism. The only way we could act, in light of this so-called fact, would be to have our actions determined for us, whether by internal drives—e.g., our uncriticizable tastes—or external forces—e.g., our cultural inheritance. As Weinstock notes, however, it is self-deception to pretend that we cannot do other than accept the choices of the community into which we were born; and it is equally delusional to think that we cannot countermand our "tastes." In short, we act in bad faith if we pretend not to have free will; but this is just what

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value pluralism demands of us, by claiming the impossibility of rational adjudication among ends. For what free will enables us to do, indeed forces us to do, is act on the basis of a conviction that the chosen action is *better* than the foregone alternatives. The "fact" of pluralism, then, is incompatible with the fact of free will. The problem with pluralism, and thus relativism, is not that they are undesirable, but that they are impossible for beings with free will genuinely to accept.

Only beings with free will need moral philosophy. Beings compatible with a world in which value pluralism were truly a fact would simply do whatever they were compelled to do, whether by internal drives or external culture. This is not to say that compulsion is bad and freedom, good. Indeed, if freedom of the will is real, then freedom of action can only be good inasmuch as it serves good ends. For the service of good ends is the only object a free will can have. When people are mistaken in their perceptions of the good, there is no intrinsic value in letting them persist in their mistakes. The role of moral philosophy is to distinguish between mistaken and accurate perceptions of the good. But the conviction that there is such a thing as *the* good is primordial; it is entailed by the conviction that we have free will, since a free will cannot be exercised if there is no putatively objective criterion that enables one to take *this* action rather than all the others.

The enterprise of moral philosophy—inaccurately called "the Enlightenment project"—is contingent on the falseness of value pluralism; if value pluralism is indeed a fact, there would be no point in appealing to human beings to do one thing rather than another. One indication of the impossibility of pluralism is the performative contradiction its advocates engage in by arguing for any one course of action rather than another. Gray, for instance, does not give his readers the empty counsel to do whatever their culture compels them to do. Instead, he urges them to reach a *modus vivendi*—among other reasons, to preserve civil peace. But not all cultures place the highest value on civil peace. Gray's advice, therefore, violates the strictures of value pluralism, as any advice to beings with free will—i.e., any philosophical argument—must do. As Pratap Mehta shrewdly observes below, human beings do not (at least not deliberately) blindly follow their cultural traditions: they demand that these be justified. In short, human beings are philosophical animals.

This observation, however, would seem to call into question

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Mehta's distinction between the philosophical and the political. This distinction allows him to concede the deterministic conclusions that follow from "the fact of pluralism," but to cordon them off from politics by categorizing pluralistic cultural determinism as merely philosophical. In Mehta's view, it is in the political sphere, not in philosophy, that values are contested and justifications demanded. For contestation and justification are precisely what the philosophical pluralist must deny is possible. One wonders, however, what it means to accept the pluralist's impossibility thesis, but only "philosophically." "Acting on reasons," the form of action that Mehta consigns to the political realm, is precisely what is presupposed by free will and, thus, moral philosophy. It would seem that there is something wrong with our axiology if it denies the possibility of moral philosophy but allows its precise analogue to reemerge in the form of politics.

Mehta may be too willing to make concessions to pluralism because pluralism appears to go with liberalism. As Berlin seems to recognize, individual freedom of action is legitimate only if it is action in pursuit of a good; but unless we are paternalistically and illiberally to constrain individuals to pursue *the* good—unless, that is, we are to *deny* them freedom of action whenever they would not willingly do the right thing—we seem driven to view *all* the things we want people to be free to do as intrinsically good. Hence value pluralism, relativism, determinism, and the repudiation of moral philosophy. There is, however, the alternative mentioned earlier: allowing people freedom not because everything they might do with it is equally good; and not, therefore, because people have a right to instantiate whatever diverse commitments they happen to find compelling; but because on balance, freedom is likelier to produce more of *the* good (whatever the good is taken to be) than coercion would. In the pluralist-liberal view, what it means to respect people as moral agents is to confer the imprimatur of the good on whatever they choose (as long as it does not conflict with respect for other moral agents' equal freedom of action). There can, however, be a monistic liberalism. This is not the false monism that dubs equal freedom an objective value, verbally objectifying what remains, at bottom, subjective value pluralism. Instead, a monist liberal considers moral agency a matter of *seeking* to do the good, and recognizes that inherent in such a quest is the possibility of *mistakes*. Thus, truly respecting people's moral agency means recognizing that they may *not* succeed in doing the good, and therefore means allowing the legitimacy, in principle, of interfering with their equal

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freedom in pursuit of the presupposition of their moral agency: the good. Thus far, monism, and, potentially, paternalism and illiberalism. But monism may lead to antipaternalism and liberalism if coercion will not, *as a matter of fact*, produce more good than harm.

Monism need not mean that everyone should live the same sort of life. Diversity of circumstance and character—including diversity of tastes and cultural background—may well entail a diversity in good forms of life if, for example, the good toward which all lives should be directed is happiness. This broadly utilitarian (hence monist) doctrine, to be found in Mill's *On Liberty*, can easily degenerate into a conflation of forms of life with ends, such that the doctrine seems to recommend diversity in ways of life for its own sake, not diversity that is instrumental to *the* good end, happiness. This degenerate form of utilitarianism may give credence to the alleged "fact" of value pluralism. But no matter how attractive alternative forms of life may be, and no matter how difficult it is to perceive "the good" against which forms of life should be judged, such perceptions, and the hard choices among forms of life to which they lead, are incumbent on us if we have free will. We may, however, legitimately forego imposing our perceptions on others if this will likely prove more effective than coercion would be in producing the good we have concluded is *the* good.

Clearly, judgments of such likelihoods, being empirical, demand knowledge of the factual contingencies involved. This is where social science comes in. It is no accident that the much-maligned Enlightenment gave rise to social science, initially in the form of economics: for unless we confuse the Enlightenment with Kant, we are bound to notice that its driving concern was, quite contrary to Kant's concern, the achievement of human happiness on earth (see Hazard [1946] 1963). To that end, the *philosophes* thought it necessary to rid the world of the otherwordly preoccupations fostered by religion, and to put in their place the search for knowledge about how social institutions could best serve the end of happiness (see Muller 1997). This—the actual Enlightenment project—should not be confused with the older *liberal* project, which originated as a twofold reaction against the Wars of Religion. One reaction, prominent among French Catholic "politiques," was to reject demands for religious uniformity on consequentialist grounds: such demands, in the presence of a large and intransigent religious minority, could only lead to the miseries of civil war. The other reaction, developed by sectarian German Protestants,

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was to view religious coercion as immoral regardless of its secular consequences, since coercion had no place in the individual soul's search for the inner light of grace. The "Protestant" argument may be the root of modern, Kantian, and pluralist liberalism; the "politique" argument may presage Enlightenment social science and utilitarianism. Be that as it may, the strength of the latter view, and of the Enlightenment project, is also their weakness. Inherently empirical, they must properly eschew a dogmatic commitment to any political doctrine, liberalism included. However sound open-mindedness may be in scientific terms, however, an open mind ill equips one for political battle. The "Protestant" view, in contrast, generates a dogmatic commitment to liberal institutions as embodying "the rights of man," irrespective of the consequences of such rights for human happiness or any other putative good (other than the empty, incoherent "good" of freedom itself).

Here, then, is a legitimate, if regrettable, distinction between the philosophical and the political, but one that reverses Mehta's schema by locating pluralism in politics and monism in philosophy. A monistic commitment to human happiness may engender social science that establishes grounds for freedom. But these grounds will be contingent, disputable, and thus badly suited to mobilize popular opinion in favor of liberal institutions. The liberal, then, will constantly be tempted to redescribe liberalism as intrinsically, not instrumentally valuable. This, in outline form, is the story Richard Boyd tells below about a twentieth-century heir to the Enlightenment project, the economist Frank Knight. When he evaluated one of the central institutions to which classical liberals had been committed—the free market—against any number of monistic criteria, Knight concluded that it did not measure up. But rather than repudiating the market, Knight shifted to a defense of it on a priori grounds: the intrinsic value of the freedom to play the "market game," regardless of its awful consequences. The market could only be vindicated on consequentialist grounds, Knight thought, if we view want-satisfaction as intrinsically valuable. And he recognized that this view makes nonsense of our free wills, which are capable of questioning the legitimacy of given wants. Yet in moving from an affirmation of the *existence* of free will to the *goodness* of exercising it in whatever direction we choose, Knight inadvertently contradicts his insight about want-satisfaction in the same way that liberal pluralists do.

If any two or more of the choices open to a free agent are equally

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valuable, whether because of value pluralism or because of the intrinsic value of her freedom of will, then free choice becomes impossible. The existence of free will is antithetical to the automatic goodness of whatever the will chooses. This would appear to dispose not only of nonconsequentialist liberalism but also its supposed adversary, value pluralism—as long as we do, indeed, possess free will.

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Daniel M. Weinstock

THE GRAYING OF BERLIN

ABSTRACT: *In* Isaiah Berlin, *John Gray interprets Berlin as having made value pluralism the basis of an anti-rationalist, "agonistic" liberalism. Gray argues that Berlin's value pluralism actually stands in tension with his liberalism, and that a whole-hearted affirmation of value pluralism should have led him to reject the claim that liberal institutions are morally superior. But Berlin's pluralism is more moderate than that ascribed to him by Gray, in that it does not allow for diminishing the value of liberty beyond a certain point. This version of pluralism is more compatible with the objectivity Gray claims for pluralism than is his own version.*

John Gray has, over the course of the last few years, taken on the task of systematically debunking the claims of what he calls "the Enlightenment project" in moral and political philosophy, with special attention to the liberal representatives of that project in the contemporary Anglo-American academy. In *Enlightenment's Wake*, for example, he takes aim at the "political nullity and intellectual sterility" (Gray 1995, 2) of the works of such thinkers as John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin, whose writings, in his view, "merely articulate the prejudices of an Anglo-American academic class that lacks any understanding of political life in our age" (ibid., 1). The intellectual bankruptcy of modern liberals is evinced, according to Gray, by the stubborn refusal of traditional religious and ethnic identities to recede before the advent

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of the "universal civilization" (ibid., 123) allegedly prophesied by Enlightenment thinkers from Condorcet to Rawls. Contemporary political philosophy should, in Gray's view, take its bearings not from the ghostly ciphers that inhabit the treatises of rationalist liberals, but from real flesh-and-blood individuals whose most salient attribute is not the disembodied reason ascribed to them by liberalism's philosophical anthropology, but rather their deep-seated cultural identities.

More formally, Gray's recent work can be read as revolving around the following four claims:

1) The chief philosophical reason for the collapse of the Enlightenment project was its refusal to take seriously the thesis of value pluralism, due to the conviction that reason issues univocal answers to moral and political questions. Value pluralism is the "theory that there is an irreducible diversity of ultimate values (goods, excellences, options, reasons for action and so forth) and that when these values come into conflict or competition with one another there is no overarching standard or principle, no common currency or measure, whereby such conflicts can be arbitrated or resolved" (Gray 1995, 68–69). The version of value pluralism that poses the most profound challenge to Enlightenment-style political philosophy is "not the competitive moral pluralism which arises when individual life-plans or conceptions of the good express incommensurable values, but rather that which occurs in conflicts between whole ways of life, each with their characteristic, and often exclusionary excellences, virtues and goods" (ibid., 141).

2) Political liberalism (in the sense of Rawls's later work), which cleaves to traditional liberalism by separating juridical questions from more fundamental issues of value, is doomed to fail, because no justification of individual rights is possible that does not ultimately refer to human interests that are, given the thesis of value pluralism, necessarily plural and incommensurable (Gray 1995, 71–72). The failure of political liberalism is also attributable to the fact that its proponents see cultural pluralism "through the distorting lens of the idea of *choice*, as an epiphenomenon of personal life-plans, preferences and conceptions of the good," whereas "in the real world of human history . . . cultural identities . . . arise by inheritance and by recognition" (ibid., 124). Gray claims, in other words, that liberals portray cultural belonging as a matter of individual choice, whereas it is really a matter of circumstance.

3) The rationalist liberal hope of containing value pluralism by

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reaching consensus over constitutional and other juridical norms must be abandoned, and hope must be placed instead in achieving temporary *modus vivendi* between groups embodying diverse and irreconcilable conceptions of the good through political negotiations over those issues that set members of radically different cultures apart (Gray 1995, 74).

4) Given the thesis of value pluralism, the only possible justification of liberalism is contingent and historicist. "The historical fact of a diversity of conceptions of the good, or of world-views, in a particular society may be a good reason for the adoption of liberal institutions in that society; but, if value pluralism is true, the range of forms of genuine human flourishing is considerably larger than can be accomodated within liberal forms of life" (Gray 1995, 133). Unless one ascribes a privileged position to liberty, there is no reason not to accept that non-liberal and non-democratic institutional forms might in certain cultural contexts permit the realization of congeries of values just as admirable as the ones that liberal institutions permit. Gray is particularly impressed with the development of East Asian societies such as Singapore, "where market institutions have been combined with political *dirigisme* and pervasive authoritarianism to yield both social stability and extraordinary economic development," as well as mainland China and Japan, which (according to Gray) "meet the test of the universal minimum of morality, and do as well *or better* than liberal states on other criteria relevant to human flourishing, without adopting liberal institutions or social norms" (ibid., 83).

In *Isaiah Berlin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), Gray tries to enlist the late, great historian of ideas into the project of debunking Enlightenment liberal philosophy by casting him as the discoverer of the theoretical foundation of the alternative edifice Gray wants to construct. That foundation is, of course, the thesis of value pluralism, which Gray calls the "single idea of enormous subversive force" that underpins "all of Berlin's work" (1). I want to argue in this paper that Gray's appropriation of Berlin for his own anti-Enlightenment philosophical purposes is unwarranted and does a great disservice to the legacy of a thinker who will, in spite of Gray's efforts, be remembered as a friend rather than as a foe of the Enlightenment and of liberalism. I will first present the main elements of Gray's interpretation of Berlin, and show that they add up to a misleading view of Berlin's thought. In the process, I will be highlighting philosophical difficulties that Gray's project runs into, but that Berlin's views avoid.

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I will then briefly characterize Berlin's philosophical methodology, in order to assess its usefulness for political philosophers in an age of pluralism.

Gray's Berlin

According to Gray, value pluralism is essential to a proper understanding of the view of liberty underpinning Berlin's most famous essay, "Two Concepts of Liberty." Gray rightly defends Berlin's preferred conception of "negative" liberty against those critics who have read him as putting forward a view similar to that of Hobbes, who saw negative liberty as a purely quantitative notion measuring the extent of the domain within which an agent can do as she pleases. For Berlin, in contrast, negative liberty is conceptually tied to "choice among alternatives or options that is unimpeded by others" (15); accordingly, Gray takes Berlin to identify the principal threat to freedom as "the restriction of choice among alternatives by other human agents" (19). Having depicted negative liberty as being bound up in this manner with the human capacity for choice, Gray can only account for the great importance Berlin ascribes to negative liberty by means of the thesis of value pluralism. If the ends and values that people can plausibly pursue are incommensurable, it follows that the only way they can rank them is by choosing. The link between value pluralism, choice, and the importance of liberty is nicely brought out in the following passage from "Two Concepts":

> If, as I believe, the ends of men are many, and not all of them are in principle compatible with each other, then the possibility of conflict—and of tragedy—can never wholly be eliminated from human life, either personal or social. The necessity of choosing between absolute claims is then an inescapable characteristic of the human condition. This gives its value to freedom as Acton had conceived of it—as an end in itself, and not as a temporary need, arising out of our confused notions and irrational and disordered lives, a predicament which a panacea could one day put right. (Berlin 1969, 169)

Gray distinguishes Berlin's pluralism-based defense of negative liberty from those of Joseph Raz and John Stuart Mill by noting that, unlike them, Berlin does not ground the value of negative liberty on the autonomy or individuality made possible by liberty. Negative lib-

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erty is a condition of our self-creation, but there is no guarantee that individuals will use their freedom to create themselves according to liberal ideals, nor should we make the value of liberty contingent upon choices being made in any particular direction.

Gray's chapter on Berlin's value-pluralism emphasizes two points. First, there are several levels of value pluralism. Pluralism is present within individual moralities and codes of conduct in that they typically include values, virtues, and goods that are irreconcilable. It is also present at the level of individual values and goods, in that they are all internally complex. For example, the value of liberty must be broken down into its constituent elements, which can then be seen to be non-compossible. And finally, Berlin is said to recognize pluralism at the level of culural forms and ways of life. Different cultures instantiate different values and mixes of values, and when they come into conflict, there is no rational way of adjudicating their rival claims (43–44). Second, Gray is at pains to distinguish relativism from the objective pluralism he ascribes to Berlin. Value relativism is the claim that values cannot be rationally assessed and must therefore be taken to have equal value. By contrast, however, pluralism is the claim that, though there is a multitude of values, and though these values might very well be incommensurable, they really exist in some sense, such that one can be right or wrong in uttering propositions containing value predicates. The clearest formulation of the thesis occurs in an article of Gray's entitled "Agonistic Liberalism": "if value-pluralism is correct, then there are *truths*, correct moral beliefs about the world. . . . It is a logical truth about any claim about value-incommensurability that it is a claim to moral knowledge" (Gray 1995, 70–71). In other words, to claim that values are incommensurable is to claim that there are certain things that we can know about values, which is already enough to defeat the relativist.

Gray devotes chapters to Berlin's views on history and to his espousal of a mild form of nationalism. I will pass over them quickly, as they strike me as unexceptionable. Suffice it to say that Berlin was vehemently opposed to all mechanistic accounts of human historical development and to scientific conceptions of historical inquiry. Historical development is, for Berlin, the history of human self-creation made possible by human freedom; he had no sympathy for determinist deniers of human free will. History must, therefore, be studied by means of the kind of sympathetic engagement exemplified in the works of two of the thinkers that Berlin most admired, Vico and

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Herder, rather than by using tools useful in the study of the natural world. And Berlin, though a liberal, was no anti-nationalist. His sympathetic identification with the creators of the state of Israel makes clear that he believed that "participation in common cultural forms and membership of communities that are self-governing or at least autonomous in their own affairs, are vital elements in human flourishing for the vast majority of the species" (100).

In a chapter on some of the thinkers of the Romantic Counter-Enlightenment to whom Berlin devoted some of his most memorable philosophical essays, Gray holds that Berlin shared with thinkers such as Hamann and Maistre "a celebration of singularity in human life, of all that which is surd and not merely the exemplar of a valuable type, the claim that, when incommensurable values and counter-values must be reconciled in practice, it is human commitment and authenticity rather than reflective deliberation, or reason, that are called upon" (135). Gray recognizes that Berlin's espousal of the views of the thinkers of the Counter-Enlightenment was only partial, and that it coexisted in his writing with a deep identification with the emancipatory project of the principal Enlightenment thinkers. At this point Gray begins to note tensions in Berlin's work, in that these two sets of views seem to be mutually incompatible. How can one affirm at the same time the views of thinkers who believed in the advent of a universal human civilization to be built around pure human reason, *and* the views of thinkers who claimed that there was no universal human nature, and that human beings were not just contingently linked to their native cultures?

Such tensions re-emerge in the final chapter of the book, where Gray confronts Berlin's value pluralism with his defense of an agonistic liberalism. Agonistic liberalism as Gray conceives of it is a chastened perspective that recognizes the limits of reason as a tool to rank values and to create political institutions designed to instantiate that ranking. For the agonistic liberal, liberty is required if individuals are to make choices in the absence of any overarching principle that could rank the many objective values there are. Since there is no unique value or ordering of values uniquely specified by reason, the state can never be justified in imposing a conception of the good by coercive means. Gray argues that Berlin's defense of even an agonistic liberalism stands in tension with his espousal of value pluralism: if it is true that there is a plurality of incommensurable values and sets of values, none of which can claim rational superiority or supremacy, it

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follows that there may very well be forms of political organization that do not recognize the canonical liberal rights, but that nonetheless permit the realization of a worthwhile form of life. "Where liberal values come into conflict with others which depend for their existence on non-liberal social or political structures and forms of life, and where these values are truly incommensurables, there can—if pluralism is true—be no argument according universal priority to liberal values" (155). Taking the full measure of value pluralism thus requires the acknowledgement that liberalism can claim no rational superiority to other political forms. Thus, the fully pluralist political philosophy that Gray envisages must go beyond Berlin's views.

The Pluralism of Value Pluralisms

Gray goes badly astray in claiming Berlin as an intellectual forefather of his own position. Note to begin with that, given its centrality to Gray's enterprise, the thesis of value pluralism is seriously undertheorized. Gray tells us that the thesis applies to all levels of practical reasoning, from the personal to the social. He characterizes it formally in terms of two main properties, *objectivity* and *incommensurability*. Gray doesn't so much argue for particular conceptions of objectivity or incommensurability—and there are many—as he simply repeats the conclusions of other philosophers. For example, he cites Bruce Brower's (1993) version of dispositional ethical realism, according to which "values (like secondary properties) are discovered by us when we find our responses coming to equilibrium under appropriate circumstances of experience and reflection" (Gray 1991, 297). Similarly, his conception of value incommensurability is borrowed from Joseph Raz, who characterizes incommensurability as a failure of transitivity in the realm of values.

It is not my intention to wade into the issues raised by the debates over axiological objectivity and incommensurability. I simply want to indicate that one can be a value pluralist without sharing Gray's specific views about either objectivity or incommensurability. For example, one can be a value pluralist and claim that tradeoffs among values are possible for all values except a specified subset, for which tradeoffs are either not permitted or only permitted to some degree. In the same spirit, one can argue that for the set of objective values $\{v_1, v_2, \ldots, v_n\}$, combinations of these values are allowable and rationally

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nonadjudicable, so long as they include value v_x at least to some specified degree. Now, despite the lack of specificity of Gray's value pluralism, his remarks make it clear that he is not ready to countenance such restrictions on the scope of value pluralism. Any value can in principle, in his view, be replaced by any other (as long as they can be objectively ascertained). Any combination of objective values is acceptable; there is no one value that need figure in all plausible combinations.

Whatever one makes of this radical form of value pluralism, it is not the version of pluralism to which Berlin himself subscribed. It is true that he sometimes expresses himself as if he were a radical pluralist. For example, in "The Pursuit of the Ideal," he writes:

> We must say that the world in which what we see as incompatible values are not in conflict is a world altogether beyond our ken; that principles which are harmonised in this other world are not the principles with which, in our daily lives, we are acquainted; if they are transformed, it is into conceptions not known to us on earth. (Berlin 1990, 13)

Nonetheless, Berlin's pluralism was of the more moderate variety of which I have just offered a thumbnail sketch. Berlin thought that tradeoffs among values were permissible and in some cases inevitable, but that negative freedom had to be an element of any admissible set. This comes out most clearly in the argument in "Two Concepts." Having shown that negative liberty has to be a component of any acceptable conception of liberty because positive liberty contains a potential for being turned into its opposite, Berlin recognizes that liberty must often be sacrificed to some degree in order to permit the realization of other important social values, such as equality. (One of Berlin's principal aims in this essay is to establish conceptual clarity: we must admit that liberty must be curtailed for the sake of other values, and resist the temptation of calling liberty so curtailed "real" liberty). But liberty must remain, at least to some minimal degree, in whatever complex of values a society chooses to pursue:

> We must preserve a minimum area of personal freedom if we are not to "degrade or deny our nature." We cannot remain absolutely free, and must give up some of our liberty to preserve the rest. But total self-surrender is self-defeating. What then must the minimum be? That which a man cannot give up without offending against the essence of human nature. (Berlin 1969, 126)

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Later, he adds:

> There are frontiers, not artificially drawn, within which men should be inviolable, these frontiers being defined in terms of rules so long and widely accepted that their observance has entered into the very conception of what it is to be a normal human being, and, therefore, also of what it is to act inhumanely or insanely. (Berlin 1969, 165)

So Berlin believes, at least at the level of social choice, that pluralism has to be tempered by liberty to some minimal degree. It might still be the case, though, that the complexes of values that meet this minimal requirement will be incommensurable.

A Common Human Nature?

The purpose served by Berlin's restricted pluralism is clarified in his essay, "Does Political Theory Still Exist?" There, Berlin claims that we need certain categories if we are to understand human beings. Among these are "such notions as society, freedom, sense of time and change, suffering, happiness, productivity, good and bad, right and wrong, choice, effort, truth, illusion" (Berlin 1978, 166). About such categories, he writes:

> To think of someone as a human being is ipso facto to bring all these notions into play: so that to say of someone that he is a man, but that choice, or the notion of truth, mean nothing to him, would be eccentric: it would clash with what we mean by 'man' not as a matter of verbal definition (which is alterable at will), but as intrinsic to the way in which we think, and (as a matter of brute fact) evidently cannot but think. (ibid., 166)

Value pluralism must, in Berlin's view, be constrained by the concepts that bound and define the recognizably human. And it is clear that in Berlin's view, freedom and choice are among these concepts.

It bears mentioning that Berlin does not think that societies and cultures have opted all that often to deny liberty. His view of the differences among cultures is much more moderate and, I would argue, much more realistic than Gray's. Where Gray contends that different cultures at least sometimes instantiate "rival and perhaps incommensurable forms of human flourishing" (Gray 1991, 266), Berlin writes

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that the very task of empathetic understanding which he made central to his conception of the historian's craft—and which he has himself applied in his own historical investigations—would be impossible were it not for common values that we share alike with Plato and the author of, say, a medieval Japanese novel. "Intercommunication between cultures in time and space is only possible because what makes men human is common to them, and acts as a bridge between them" (Berlin 1991, 11). More clearly still:

> The differences among people and societies can be exaggerated. No culture that we know lacks the notions of good and bad; true and false. . . . These are universal values. . . . There are values that a great many human beings in the vast majority of places and situations, at almost all times, do in fact hold in common. . . . I think that every culture which has ever existed assumed that there exist such human rights—or at least a minimum of them. There may be disagreement about how far to expand this minimum . . . but that such rights exist and that they are an empirical pre-condition of the leading of full human lives—that has been recognized by every culture. (Ibid., 37, 39)

Gray sees a tension between Berlin's affirmation of the existence of "goods or evils that are generically human" and his historicist conviction that "man is a self-transforming animal, that nothing in his thought is in principle immune from alteration by the growth of knowledge" (Berlin 1996, 66). But why need there be a tension? Why, unless we are already committed to the view that human nature is *either* (as the protagonists of the "Enlightenment project" are alleged to have claimed) fixed and universal, *or*, as Counter-Enlightenment Romantics believed, entirely the result of self-creation, can we not allow Berlin the thought that self-creation occurs within certain conceptual limits, and that when it oversteps those limits, we are no longer inclined to view the resulting form of life as a version of human flourishing?

I have argued thus far that the value pluralisms espoused by Gray and Berlin are actually quite different. Gray's is an unrestricted pluralism allowing for tradeoffs among any and all objective values, whereas Berlin's is constrained by the categories that provide the contours of our concept of the human. Choice and freedom are simply elements of that set, according to Berlin, and so no complex of values can entirely dispense with them without losing its claim to represent a vi-

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able form of human flourishing. There are, moreover, in Berlin's work grounds for according freedom and choice (or freedom *as* choice) a privileged status within the set of "human" categories. Indeed, given value pluralism and incommensurability, choice is the only resource we possess with which to select between values.

Why Objective Value Pluralists Must Value Freedom

Gray argues at various points that, despite the evidence of significant self-creation and self-transformation throughout history, and despite the radically different cultural forms to which self-creation and self-transformation have led, we have no reason to privilege forms of life that "accord a central place to choice in human life" (24), even though human beings clearly do have a *capacity* for choice. Gray claims that to move from evidence of self-creation and self-transformation to the value of choice would be to commit the naturalistic fallacy. This is a stunning accusation coming from Gray, whose claim that cultural pluralism *ought to* be at the top of the agenda for political philosophers is based in large measure on the notion that different cultures do *in fact* construe moral life differently, and that for the people who are members of these cultures, these construals determine the nature and contents of their moral obligations. But suppose, with Gray, that there are certain cultural forms that, though they in some indirect sense manifest the human capacity for self-creation, marginalize freedom and choice to a significant degree: cultures that just *happen* to people. Gray's claim is that a value pluralist cannot claim that these cultures are in any way inferior to ones that do give pride of place to freedom and choice.

It seems to me that this claim is, in fact, in great tension with value pluralism as Gray construes it. Gray's value pluralism is a thesis about the way things really are in the domain of value. As we have seen, it comes complete with an epistemology, telling us what the standards and procedure are which will allow us to view the domain of value aright. Now compare two stereotypical figures, Liberal and Traditional. Liberal knows all or most of what there is to be known about values. That is, he knows that there are many values, he knows what most of them are, and he knows that the ways of life that can be built around different complexes of these values are incommensurable. Wanting to avoid the fate of Buridan's Ass, he picks one such com-

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plex, and lives his life in accordance with it, all the while knowing that he could have done otherwise, and aware of the plausibility and admirability of other complexes of values instantiated in the lives of people from other cultures of which he has heard. Consider now Traditional. Traditional has inherited a culture from his forebears that instantiates some complex of plausible human values. But Traditional does not view this culture as resulting from a choice; rather, he views it as his destiny. He may or may not be aware of other values and sets of values, but if he is, he views them as inferior. He lives either in ignorance of or in contempt towards ways of life instantiating different values.

Clearly, Liberal knows something that Traditional does not. Liberal is right in his beliefs about value, whereas Traditional is wrong. His epistemic superiority has to do, moreover, not with some marginal fact or relatively trivial aspect of human existence. Rather, it has to do with moral and prudential values that give meaning to life and allow for cooperation and solidarity within communities. Given his objective value pluralism, Gray can deny this superiority only by trivializing pluralism in a way that runs against the whole thrust of his argument. He would have to claim, in effect, the following: "Value-pluralism is an important truth, one that ought to lead us to forswear the way we have been doing practical philosophy since the Enlightenment. But it doesn't much matter whether people believe it or not." This would be, to say the least, an uncomfortable position for Gray to find himself in. Somewhat like utilitarianism, value pluralism would in effect require for its realization that people believe it to be false.

Gray is aware of this danger to his theory, and he claims to offset it by noting that liberty-denying particularist cultures need not make universalistic claims about the worth of their own sets of values. They can live wholly within their own particular cultures while appreciating the value of other cultures. They can thus "perceive and accept the truth of value-pluralism, and its corollary, the worth and validity of radically different forms of life" (152). But by Gray's own admission, at least some particularistic cultures deny the liberal model of choice, and thus their members view their values as a matter of circumstance rather than of choice. Although Gray contends that no complex of values has any special claim upon our reason, and thus that the adoption of any particular set of values is a contingent matter, his characterization of illiberal particularist cultures holds that their members take their values to be somehow inevitable for them.

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Thus, even the broad-minded Traditional envisaged by Gray must be wrong about the nature of values.

This tension in Gray's theory undermines one of the counterarguments he offers against the view that pluralism entails a liberal concern with individual rights. In this view, if value pluralism is true, then states should not impose any particular value, but should instead let a hundred flowers bloom. Political institutions that refrain from imposing any particular set of values and afford their citizens space within which to come to their own conclusions about matters of the good are therefore to be preferred. Gray's response is to claim that if value-pluralism does in fact imply that diversity is a good thing, it follows that "the human world will be still richer in value if it contains not only liberal societies but also illiberal regimes that shelter worthwhile forms of life that would otherwise perish" (152). But richer for whom? The instantiation of value *per se* is not a good thing. It is only good to realize values if human beings can in some way or other benefit from them. The value of diversity is therefore not that it makes the world a more pleasing place from some completely detached, God-like point of view, but rather, that it contributes to human well-being. How might it do this? Exactly as the liberal claims it does: by providing people with a richer palette of values on the basis of which to assess the choices they have made or that have been handed down to them, and, in some cases, to make their lives anew. In this way, Liberal will benefit from the kind of diversity that exists in her own liberal society. But the mere existence of diversity can hardly be of any benefit to Traditional, caught up as he is in a particularistic culture that will either deny him knowledge of other cultures' complexes of value, or that will cause him to view other possible values as inaccessible.

Let me make one last observation about the real implications of Gray's value pluralism. As we have already seen, Gray criticizes Berlin for refusing to commit himself wholeheartedly either to the rationalism and universalism of the Enlightenment or to the particularism and emphasis on self-creation of the Romantics. But if value pluralism is true, and in particular, if both choice *and* the Romantic "beautiful soul" are objective values, then Berlin is right not to deny one for the sake of the other, and Gray is wrong to demand of him the kind of ethical consistency that value pluralism is supposed to rule out. For if value pluralism is true, we should appreciate a panoply of values that are not always compatible. In the face of the

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incompatibility between Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment values, therefore, the right approach is not to insist on tidy conceptual coherence, but rather to promote what is worthwhile even when this leads to logical contradiction. This is clearly the attitude Berlin recommends. He recognizes that the ethical outlooks we inherit are inconsistent, but insists that both of the incompatible sets of values deserve our allegiance. So, in "The Romantic Revolution," he describes "the civilised members of Western societies" as having developed a "logically unsatisfactory but historically and psychologically enriched capacity" to embrace both the ethical outlook born of the Romantic movement, stressing motive and character, and an earlier ethical outlook which had emphasized "achievement and consequence" (Berlin 1996, 193). He is similarly unconcerned about the logical link that might or might not connect the affirmation of value pluralism with the defense of liberal institutions (though, as we have seen above, a better case can be made for the relation between the two than Gray allows). In an interview Berlin said that "pluralism and liberalism are not the same or even overlapping concepts. . . . I believe in both liberalism and pluralism, but they are not logically connected" (Berlin and Jahanbegloo 1991, 44). His attitude seemed to be that pluralism and liberalism are both values that, independently of their consistency, are elements of our cultural birthright and deserve our allegiance. So much the worse for consistency if it requires that we abandon one for the sake of the other.

I have thus far been concerned with spelling out the very important differences between the value pluralisms espoused by Gray and Berlin. My principal aim has been to defend the restricted value pluralism that can be gleaned from Berlin's writings. I have argued that this form of value pluralism is more in line with the objectivity Gray wants to claim than is Gray's own more radical construal. If I am right, there is no need to argue *from* pluralism *to* a liberal defense of individual freedom, for the most plausible form of objective value pluralism—which is found in at least germinal form in Berlin's writings—will *already* include a commitment to freedom.

Berlin's Conception of Philosophy

Having defended Berlin-as-liberal against Gray's proposed post-liberal appropriation, I want to end by pointing out certain limitations that

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political philosophers wanting to learn from Berlin will be forced to recognize. These have to do with Berlin's conception of philosophy.

The ease with which Berlin seems willing to accept inconsistencies in his writing and among his ideas, when compared with the obstinacy with which Gray seeks to root them out, should alert us to the fact that Berlin was a most reluctant normative political philosopher. As is well known, Berlin abandoned traditional, Oxford-style analytic philosophy after the Second World War, having become convinced that, outside of logic and psychology, progress in philosophy was impossible, and that it was only by taking on history that "one could hope to know more at the end of one's life than when one had begun" (Berlin 1978, vii–viii).[1] This is of course not to say that his historical essays do not have normative significance. In a manner that foreshadowed the (otherwise very different) works of Quentin Skinner and Charles Taylor, Berlin's essays always had a "presentist" agenda. His essays on the Enlightenment and the Counter-Enlightenment were in great part motivated by the desire to set before the modern reader (and the modern philosopher) the full range of values constituting her intellectual and moral inheritance, to make clear to her the resources upon which she can draw in her moral life and her moral theorizing, and to bring out the costs involved in one-sided theoretical edifices that emphasize only one aspect of a more complex intellectual heritage. By the same token, "Two Concepts" is at least as much an historical essay as one devoted to the task of conceptual analysis. Berlin's aim is not to show that positive liberty must degenerate into its opposite, but that as a matter of historical record it has. And his unequalled capacity for historical understanding was put to the task of articulating the mechanisms through which this perversion has actually occured.[2]

But given his doubts concerning philosophy's capacity to yield determinate normative conclusions, Berlin did not develop a moral or political theory in the full sense, preferring instead to indicate the agenda that history has set for us, both the limits it imposes and the resources with which it provides us. David Pears (1991, 38) exaggerates only slightly when he writes that in Berlin's conception of philosophical inquiry, "history has the last word."

One explanation of Berlin's disaffection might invoke the sterility of the philosophical climate which he encountered in the Oxford of the 1930s. But Berlin's writings on the methods of philosophy make clear that he doubted that it is in our power to offer determi-

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nate answers to philosophical questions, whatever the approach we try. In "The Purpose of Philosophy," "Philosophy and Government Repression," and "Does Political Theory Still Exist?" Berlin argued that philosophy can yield satisfactory answers to our queries only when questions that had been thought of as philosophical can be fit into one of the two types of "viable" disciplines of inquiry, the formal and the empirical. Only when they are susceptible to a science with canonical methods of inquiry and standards of evidence and proof can these questions admit of determinate answers. Philosophy itself has neither accepted methods of inquiry nor widely shared standards of proof. And so the questions that belong specifically to the province of the philosopher are destined to remain unanswered. As Berlin puts it in "Philosophy and Government Repression,"

> The history of the sciences, both deductive and inductive, has consisted largely, if not entirely, in the way in which groups of related questions to which the answers have previously not been altogether clear are suddenly seen to depend for their answer upon methods which are clearly either empirical or formal; once this is perceived these subjects leave the general field of undifferentiated human enquiry, presided over by philosophy, and set up as independent sciences on their own, with specific techniques, specific rules and teachable methods of procedure. What is left is the rich but confusing province of philosophy proper, which deals with the whole gamut of questions where the method of solution is not clear, not given as part of the formulation of the question itself. (Berlin 1996, 57)

For Berlin, paradigmatically philosophical questions have a particular poignancy because they are both the most difficult to resolve (since philosophy does not even provide us with tools that might allow us to know what might *count* as a resolution) and also the most urgent and emotionally charged, since they often deal with central questions of human existence, in particular questions of value. "Ethics, aesthetics, criticism explicitly concerned with general ideas, all but the most technical types of history and scholarship, still live at various points of this limbo, unable or unwilling to emerge by either the empirical or the formal door" (Berlin 1978, 147).

The peculiar status of philosophical questions means that the philosopher cannot patiently labor within the confines of an established research paradigm, attempting to solve a well-defined problem

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by means of well-established tools. Berlin writes that "that is why many virtues are of little use in philosophy: patience, industry, capacity for taking pains, a retentive memory, skill in ordering material; all these excellent qualities which are needed by historians, logicians, natural scientists sometimes tend to become enemies of the truth in philosophy" (Berlin 1996, 71). What, then, does the philosopher do? Her object will principally be the concepts and categories in terms of which we conceive of our situation, "the permanent or semi-permanent categories in terms of which experience is conceived and classified," as Berlin puts it in "The Purpose of Philosophy" (1978, 9). Philosophical progress is made when, in a revolutionary spirit, a philosopher succeeds in reformulating the categories in terms of which basic problems are framed. "Great philosophers," writes Berlin, "always transform, upset and destroy." They are "bound to subvert, break through, destroy, let in air from outside" (Berlin 1996, 67, 70). The aim of the philosopher must therefore be to identify tensions or inadequacies among our basic concepts and categories, and to dispel them by proposing a radical paradigm shift. But the very nature of philosophical progress guarantees that this will not often occur. This is, in Berlin's view, what happened during the Romantic Counter-Enlightenment. In introducing that major change in outlook, Berlin writes disarmingly that "in the history of Western political thought there have occurred at least (it seems to me) three major turning-points of this type" (ibid., 168). In other words, the huge majority of philosophers are condemned by the very nature of what it means to achieve progress in philosophy to the status of obscure under-laborers.

Given the bleak prospects for progress offered by Berlin's conception of philosophy, it is not surprising that he decided to try his hand elsewhere. This is unfortunate, because it seems to me that Berlin's conception of philosophy is wholly wrongheaded. I would like in this final section to sketch out an alternative account of philosophical method that Berlin might have found quite congenial, given his commitment to value pluralism.

We can begin by noting a mistake that Berlin himself has identified in his critique of positive liberty. The mistake consists in thinking that rationalism and monism are somehow conceptually connected. Moral monism is the metaphysical thesis that there is ultimately only one real value, and that all others can be reduced to it. Utilitarianism is a form of monism. Rationalism is the view that moral judgments (or

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evaluative judgments more broadly) can be shown to be true or false (or justified or unjustified). Now if value pluralism and incommensurability are *true*, the ideally rational person will recognize that on some ethical questions involving several different values, human reason will not issue univocal verdicts. So, though it has historically been a temptation for rationalists to be monists, the fact is that if value pluralism is true, rationalism would actually involve the denial of monism.

If we think of philosophy as the extension and systematization of normal human rational activity, the question we must face is the following: what tasks can reason legitimately set itself given the truth of value pluralism? I would like to claim that there are two important functions that moral and political philosophy can continue to play even when value pluralism has been fully accepted. The first, simply put, is the task of discovery. If there are, as objective value-pluralists claim, a multiplicity of values that constitute legitimate aims of human action, the one rational activity that must be undertaken is that of figuring out to the best of our ability what these values are. To make clear what this activity might involve, consider two contrasting ways of understanding the claim defended by both Berlin and Gray that different cultures and collective forms of life embody different values or sets of values. The first, which I shall call the radical thesis, claims that there is no way of knowing what values and combinations of values an objective value pluralism should recognize until different cultures actually take them up and embody them in their institutions and practices. Alternatively, the moderate thesis is that we can come to some understanding of what these values and combinations of values are *independently* of their actually having been taken up by particular communities and cultures. In the latter view, philosophical inquiry can determine the constraints within which particular cultures and communities must operate if the goods they instantiate are to be deemed worthwhile.

The radical thesis is hard-pressed to avoid relativism. It implies that the only means of discovering objective values is for them to be actually instantiated. There are, in this view, no independent grounds for evaluating different cultures' ways of ordering and realizing values. To avoid relativism, I would argue, one must embrace the moderate thesis.

If the moderate thesis is true, the independent judgment of value systems will have to be grounded in some appropriately complex

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view of human flourishing. If objective value pluralism is true, it follows that there are many, but not infinitely many ways of leading a good human life. Human nature imposes some constraints on what values might legitimately be pursued by human beings, and it should also give us some insight into what these values are. Philosophy, along with more empirically grounded disciplines such as history, sociology, biology, and psychology, must work hand in hand to avoid both the implausible apriorism about human nature that has too often tempted philosophers and the vulgar reductionism that has characterized such disciplines as sociobiology.

Second, if value pluralism is true, philosophy can clarify how different conceivable answers to pressing moral problems would realize certain values while sacrificing others. Take as an example the much-debated problem of doctor-assisted suicide. Value pluralism explains quite simply and elegantly why it is that there does not seem to be any simple and fully satisfying conclusion as to whether this practice should be tolerated. Patient autonomy as well as considerations of individual well-being and the avoidance of unnecessary pain would seem to warrant a liberalization of present laws. But considerations of human dignity and the inviolability of human life, as well as consequentialist concerns about the social impact of liberalization, are taken by many to support the prohibition of all but "passive" forms of euthanasia. I doubt very much that philosophers—or anyone else for that matter—can come up with a solution to the problem of doctor-assisted suicide that does not end up sacrificing some important human values. But philosophers can make clear what values are involved. At the end of the day, citizens will have to decide which set of values they want to affirm, and which set they are prepared to sacrifice, albeit regretfully; and there is probably nothing philosophers can do to guide that choice beyond a certain point. But the quality of public debate is surely increased by the type of elucidation I have just described.

Finally, philosophers can often use their critical tools to make clear the *implications* of certain settled moral convictions. It is, for example, a settled conviction among contemporary liberals that a principal role of the state is to provide citizens with "primary goods"—both rights and liberties and material resources—with which they can pursue their own conceptions of the good life. The recent work of Will Kymlicka (1989 and 1995) can be read as an attempt to show that this commitment should make liberals take more seriously than they have

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heretofore the collective rights-claims of minority cultural groups. The argument, in a nutshell, is that a secure cultural context should figure in any plausible set of primary goods designed to promote individual autonomy. Without suggesting that I think Kymlicka's argument is entirely convincing (see Weinstock 1998), it seems to me that his work shows how philosophers might helpfully illuminate the plural moral context within which our most difficult moral and political decisions must be made.

None of the tasks I have just adumbrated is in line with the heroic conception of philosophy that Berlin argues is necessary for philosophical progress. But I would submit that those who engage in these more modest tasks are capable of making real contributions to the debates we will inevitably face in the context of moral pluralism. In my view, Berlin unduly dismisses the workaday enterprise of conceptual clarification and evaluation of arguments, activities that might come to be found particularly illuminating in times of value pluralism. But for all of that, Berlin's work does not culminate in the nonliberal and antiphilosophical pluralism attributed to it by Gray.

NOTES

1. For an interesting discussion of the transformation in Berlin's philosophical interests, see Pears 1991.
2. For the place of historical argument in "Two Concepts," see Galipeau 1994.

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Pratap B. Mehta

PLURALISM AFTER LIBERALISM?

ABSTRACT: *John Gray argues that the doctrine of value pluralism poses a serious challenge for liberalisms of the Rawlsian and Millian kind. The only proper political doctrine that is compatible with value pluralism is a* modus vivendi *that can take various forms. But in truth, value pluralism does little to diminish the appeal of liberalism. Under modern conditions, any half-decent* modus vivendi *will look more like liberalism than Gray supposes.*

To enter into the intellectual world that John Gray describes in *Enlightenment's Wake* (London: Routledge, 1995) and *Endgames* (Cambridge: Polity, 1997) is to descend not into the placid consensus of a post-ideological age, but into the chaos of a world that is still struggling to interpret its own meaning. On Gray's view, most of the ruling ideas and ideologies that gave the world a semblance of coherence and provided sources of moral conviction have come to be burdened with so many limitations and disclaimers that hardly anything is left of them. Not only do these ideas and ideologies not track the great transformations of our world; worse still, they impede a proper understanding of these transformations. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of Asian powers are not, on Gray's view, victories for any particular ideology, but exposures of the limitations of all ideology. They signify the collapse of what Gray calls the Enlightenment project, which held out hopes for progress towards a universal civilization. This aspiration was shared by liberalism and

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Marxism alike. Postmodernism, in its very claim to give up the comforting metanarratives of the Enlightenment, simply reinscribes them through its project of deconstructing cultures everywhere. And "in supposing that the post modern condition is the historical fate of all societies, post modernists cling to a westernizing narrative of modernity" (Gray 1997, 158). In cultures that never harbored illusions of a universal truth, such as Japan, the perspectivism that postmodernism represents is not a novel condition or manifestation of a cultural crisis, but a "natural way of looking at the world" (ibid., 159). Postmodernism represents as universal what is, in essence, an event in a few histories, and in doing so it participates in the universalist illusions of the Enlightenment.

The other central pillars of the Western tradition fare little better in Gray's account. Humanism, a perspective in which "humans are privileged over other animals in their place as unique sites of truth, meaning and value," has nothing of the sense of limits that will be vital to living in a "balance with the earth and peace with one another" (Gray 1997, 159). Humanism participates in the ultimate hubris: the attempt to master nature by transcending the limits it sets on us. Postmodernism is merely a radicalization of this tendency. It rids us of the concept of nature altogether and replaces it with the fantasy of self-creation at will. Science, the handmaiden of the attempt to master nature, also has serious disabilities. It cannot answer the question of its own value on its own terms. As a cultural institution it reinforces the instrumental understanding of humankind's relations with the earth, and it crowds out other modes of being and thinking that better serve human needs.

If all this sounds as if it belongs to the atmosphere of cultural pessimism reflected in the pages of a Max Weber or a Robert Musil, rather than reflecting the buoyant hopes of libertarianism with which Gray was once associated, it is because the source of his inspiration now seems to be Heidegger rather than Hayek. The story of Gray's journey from classical liberalism to existential conservatism, and the transformations in his view of the *Zeitgeist,* would take a long essay in its own right. His views seem to be still evolving and do not have a settled and carefully elaborated structure. What is clear, and what saves him from the despair that characterizes so many critics of the Enlightenment, is his opinion that we are now in a better position to recognize the truth of the doctrine of value pluralism.

Value pluralism is the claim that there are objective values, but that

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these are irreducibly diverse. They often conflict and cannot be made commensurable by any measure. By denying this truth, the leading ideologies of the West harbored dangerous illusions. They gave universal authority to what were, in effect, particular views of life. And they rested on foundations that—as Nietzsche showed—were thoroughly question-begging. Value pluralism implies, in Gray's view, that any *philosophical* adjudication of the conflict of values is doomed to failure, and that the only route available in politics is to find a *modus vivendi* that can keep the peace and allow cultures to reproduce themselves. His account of the impoverishment of our leading political ideologies, however, especially liberalism, is more elaborate than is his presentation of a pluralist alternative, and it is on his critique of liberalism that I concentrate in this essay.

The Impoverishment of Leading Ideologies

Gray is a relentless critic of most contemporary political theory. Gray argues that the ideology of the New Right, for instance, that seemed to govern so many Western democracies during the latter years of the Cold War and is now being exported with a vengeance to the rest of the world, rests on the fallacy that markets are free-standing institutions that do not need to be embedded in cultural forms that promote trust, integrity, and virtue—which the unfettered operations of the market may undermine. The supposition that the superiority of the market can be established once and for all, without taking into account the varying history, circumstances, and aspirations that people inherit, diminishes the explanatory value of this ideology and reduces it to sectarian dogmatism. And the espousal of this ideology by conservatives renders conservatism incoherent, as they try to defend not only market institutions but also particular cultural forms and ways of life, such as the traditional family, without acknowledging the deep conflicts between the two. Free trade undermines the creation of common cultural forms; and one of the few concrete recommendations to emerge from these volumes is that globalization be restricted by "classical protectionist policies or by other means" (Gray 1997, 183).

Socialism's fallacies were always too obvious to Gray for them to merit much consideration in these volumes. Communitarianism, while salutary in its attention to the need for common cultural forms,

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is, he contends, debilitated by a politics of nostalgia and an impoverished sociological imagination. Gray reserves much of his polemical ammunition for that which many regard as our reigning ideology: liberalism. These volumes present only the latest in Gray's evolving views on liberalism. In *Liberalisms* (1989), Gray had begun expressing skepticism about the possibility of providing liberalism with adequate philosophical foundations. *Post Liberalism* (1993) still made a provisional case for liberalism, not as a philosophical theory but as a certain kind of political practice, in which the "indeterminacies and incommensurabilities that afflict the principles articulated in liberal political philosophy are resolved locally and provisionally, in a variety of recurrent political and juridical settlements achieved in the diversity of liberal regimes that are to be found in the real world of history" (Gray 1995, 132). *Post Liberalism* still supposed that the institutions central to a liberal civil society were the most congenial to the truth of value pluralism. Civil society may take many forms, but would still be constituted by central elements of liberalism. However, Gray now holds that value pluralism is *not* a good reason to adopt a Western-style civil society, that pluralism and liberalism are in deep tension with one another, and that there are no good reasons to privilege liberalism over pluralism.

In some ways the arguments of *Enlightenment's Wake* and *Endgames* are continuous with Gray's earlier skepticism about providing foundational justifications for liberalism. In the more recent volumes, varieties of liberalism are treated as exemplars of an "Enlightenment Project" that aspires to make human beings shed their traditional allegiances and identities so as to unite "in a universal society grounded in a generic humanity and a rational morality." This project seeks to displace varied and local moralities by principles that all human beings could agree to by virtue of their being rational persons. Liberalism is, according to Gray, incoherent because it shares in this aspiration.

As Gray's work shows, the transformation of liberalism from an embattled ideological creed that fought against religious intolerance, intellectual obscurantism, confining traditions, and obsequious forms of dependence, into the settled and hegemonic ruling philosophy of many Western societies, has not diminished its vulnerability to criticism. Despite being more politically durable than any of its nineteenth-century rivals, liberalism's victory appears fragile to both its critics and defenders. This is in part because its victory has not ren-

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dered the motivations and aspirations that sustain the critics of liberalism less compelling. Inequitable distribution of power and income are unlikely to cease being a source of dissatisfaction; the quest for enchantment and meaning is unlikely to disappear; affirming the dignity of the individual is unlikely to do away with all questions of collective belonging; the enunciation of universalism is unlikely to diminish the force that particular histories have for particular people; rapid technological transformations are unlikely to substitute for more settled social forms and relationships; the valorization of choice will hardly settle questions of the sources of ultimate value; the dominance of the market will hardly satisfy yearnings for a life in common that goes beyond the protection of basic liberties. The odd mixture of pessimistic piety and tough-minded self-congratulation with which liberals rebut these criticisms has done little to invalidate their legitimacy. Invocations of our modern predicament—while serving as a reminder of some sociological realities—beg as many questions about human aspirations and their fulfillment as they answer. Many of these dissatisfactions and aspirations find expression in Gray's work, as they do in the work of an assortment of so-called communitarians, civic republicans, and social democrats. But for Gray, these critics merely point out what liberalism lacks; they don't assail its very foundations. Gray's ambitions run much deeper: to expose the fact that the dominant liberalism of our time rests on rickety and unpersuasive foundations that obscure the human predicament rather than illuminate it.

Nor is Gray is impressed by "postmodern bourgeois liberalism" of the sort espoused by Richard Rorty, who eschews foundational questions altogether. Rorty sees liberalism less as resting upon universalist foundations than as a clarification, elaboration, and redescription of an ongoing practice. But this argument is ultimately unpersuasive for three reasons. It misdescribes the ongoing self-image of societies such as the United States, which in fact regard themselves as bearers of a universal morality. Thus, his own claims notwithstanding, instead of pursuing the intimations of particular liberal practices, Rorty seeks to transform them. Second, he exaggerates the degree to which all members of his society share his liberal premises. And third, in trying to dispense with the burden of justification altogether, he is unpersuasive to those even within liberal societies who do share his premises.

Gray's repudiation of Rortian antifoundationalism leaves two dominant strands of liberalism that attempt to meet the burdens of justifi-

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cation: Millian perfectionist liberalism, and the Kantian rights-based liberalism that finds recent expression in the work of Rawls. Gray attempts to demolish the foundational pretenses of these liberalisms in order to prepare the way for a defense of what he call a *modus vivendi* view of politics.

Pluralism contra Liberalism

Millian liberalism, the first of Gray's targets, regards autonomy as a central value. Autonomy is one component of an elaborate conception of human flourishing that unites within it a vast array of human aspirations, leaving out, perhaps, only genuinely religious ones. John Stuart Mill constantly attempts to reconcile these different aspirations in the search for a richer mode of living. Reason and feeling; permanence and progression; reflexive distance and intimacy; liberty and authority; missionary zeal and solitude; individuality and nationality; critical rationalism and expressive wholeness, all find powerful expressions in Mill's writing. But the synthesis of these different aspirations seems, in retrospect, profoundly unstable if not downright incoherent. If Mill and his followers, including at one time Gray (see his *Mill on Liberty: A Defence*) were able to disguise the fragility of their own constructions, it was in no small measure due to the peculiar character of the belief in progress that underwrote them. This view of progress rested on the Panglossian belief that all legitimate human aspirations could be instantiated in a society simultaneously, and that all that was noble and best in the human endeavor would be embodied in the most advanced societies without significant loss. It further stipulated that societies could be arrayed on single scale according to the degree to which they afforded its members the opportunities to realize the highest human form—what Mill called the Noble character. Mill never expected each individual to realize these ideals; *On Liberty* is as much an attempt to give reasons to those who won't realize them to tolerate those who will as it is a defense of liberty. Nevertheless, his philosophy of history was accompanied by a whole series of identifications of all that was good—autonomy, reason, rationality, progress, reflexivity, benevolence—with one civilization alone. Other civilizations were frozen in a state of arrested development, capable of being set in motion towards the universal *telos* of history only through the benevolent despotism of outsiders.

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This account of progress makes Mill's well-known antipathy toward the genuine plurality of cultures and civilizations less a matter of personal prejudice than doctrinal blindness. Mill seldom recognizes that the onward march of progress might be associated with loss; that some significant part of the human experience might be instantiated in different cultures; that a single culture may not possess a monopoly over all that is worthy of consideration. The ease, self-confidence, and vehemence with which Mill defended the hierarchy of cultures, and made a series of insidious and ultimately uncompelling contrasts between them, make his liberalism unsuited to comprehend a real diversity of goods and the social forms they take. It infused liberalism with an impoverished social imagination that disabled it from taking genuine pluralism seriously.

The degree to which Millian liberalism is tied to Mill's particular conception of progress and the cultural imperialism that it entailed is a debatable matter. What is less debatable is that Mill rested the authority of the ideal character toward which his liberalism aspired on nothing more secure than *fiat*. For one thing, as Gray argues in the second edition of his *Mill on Liberty: A Defence,* Mill's central claim that a defensible conception of the good life will have autonomy as one of its central components is simply asserted rather than argued for. Once the close alignment between well-being and autonomy is broken down it is much more difficult to argue for the foundational claims of autonomy as a value, as the difficulties surrounding its defense in the work of Joseph Raz attest.[1]

For Gray, contemporary Rawlsian liberalism, though perhaps historically less insidious, is philosophically no better than Mill's doctrine. It shares the universalist aspiration of Millian liberalism embodied in the claims that all human beings, properly exercising their reason, will converge on a single set of values as being of paramount importance, and that a unique set of institutions will give them expression. Rawls appears at first sight more responsive to the "fact of pluralism" by endeavoring to provide a basic framework of rights and obligations within which diverse conceptions of the good could be pursued. It is precisely because there are a diversity of goods, incommensurable with one another, that Rawls seeks regulative principles of justice and rights that do not presuppose any conceptions of the good, but which can set the terms within which the pursuit of these goods may be carried out. Gray tirelessly repeats what are by now a series of familiar objections against this view. The conception of the

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person it presupposes is a cipher, emptied of the contingencies and history that are essential to its identity; the good with which this cipher is concerned is not the good of any *particular* human being, but the good we all have in common; the plurality of agents Rawls posits must be delusive since, on his view, we all have the same beliefs and motivations. Rawls's project remains a universalist one in that its results are the same for all those to whom it is meant to apply.

For Gray, then, both Millian and Rawlsian liberalism founder on the shoals of value pluralism. This doctrine, potently expressed in the writings of Isaiah Berlin and Joseph Raz, holds that there is an irreducible plurality of valuable goods, activities, and ways of life that are conflicting and often uncombinable, and that sometimes, when they come into conflict with one another, they are incommensurable. Gray does not deny that the whole range of goods declared to be goods *are* goods. But he denies that these goods can be assessed, compared, and hierarchically ordered by a common measure.

This view, if true, sinks Millian liberalism because it entails that there is no single conception of human flourishing that can be vindicated as being superior to all its rivals. Thus the project of arraying societies on a single scale is fundamentally incoherent. And Rawlsian rights-based liberalism is plausible only if we suppose that principles of right, unlike conceptions of the good, can be shielded from the force of value incommensurability. Unlike Raz and Berlin, Gray argues that pluralism and liberalism, rather than being allies, cannot be easily reconciled. Pluralists have to be committed to the view that there is *no* particular value that, in the case of conflicts with other values, takes precedence over them. Rawlsian liberalism, however, if it is to have any content at all, has to maintain the existence of precisely such values: the basic liberties, "a uniquely determinate and finally fixed set of compossible or dovetailing freedoms." If value pluralism is correct, there is no standpoint from which the priority of these liberties and the political settlements they entail can de derived. To the degree to which there can no be no rational resolution of the incommensurabilities characteristic of conflicts between and within cultures, the very project of a *philosophical* adjudication between values is doomed to failure.

Hence arises the need for what Gray terms a *modus vivendi* that can contain potential value conflicts. Gray argues:

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> In political milieus which harbor a diversity of cultural traditions and identities, such as we find in most parts of the world today, the institutional forms best suited to a *modus vivendi* may well not be the individualist institutions of liberal civil society but rather those of political and legal pluralism in which the fundamental units are not individuals but communities. In polities that are plural or divided, the legal recognition of different communities and their different jurisdictions may well be mandated on the Hobbesian ground that it promotes peace. It may be justified on another independent ground. . . . Such a legal pluralism is justifiable, in other words, not only on the Hobbesian rationale of promoting the peace but also on the Herderian ground that it allows even people who are co-mingled in the same territories or human settlements to recognize their cultural identities in the legal order to which they are subject. (Gray 1995, 136)

Exactly what a pluralist *modus vivendi* would look like cannot be specified independently of the circumstances that occasion a need for it. The terms of political settlement may vary from context to context. They can be elaborated only in the practices of agents rather than being settled in advance by the requirements of theory; the authority of these settlements is not the authority of reason. Indeed, a *modus vivendi* is necessitated precisely because there are no further reasons that may adjudicate the matter at hand. Politics in a sense begins where reasons stop; a genuinely political conception of justice will therefore not ground its authority in philosophical vindication but in procedural politics. Further, a *modus vivendi* may require that the bearers of rights are communities and not individuals; that political orders can be "vessels for the transmission of ways of life across the generations and that the forms of government may legitimately vary according to the cultures of the people they serve" (Gray 1995, 138). The pluralist view is permissive about the range of regimes that are acceptable and it harbors no reason to suppose that these should converge on a set of basic liberties. It is entirely proper for Gray to insist that there is no straight road from pluralism to liberalism. Pluralism and liberalism are allies to the extent that monists and fanatics of all stripes will find them less than congenial. But in Berlin's work, as Gray correctly senses, there is a curious fallacy that goes from the plausible fact that monism can lead to illiberalism to the conclusion that therefore, pluralism should lead to liberalism. A genuine pluralism would contemplate a whole range of institutional, political, and

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social vistas, in each of which the balance of enshrined values is different.

For Gray, there are two standards according to which such arrangements are to be judged: whether they keep the Hobbesian peace and whether they allow their citizens to renew their distinct forms of common life. By Gray's criteria a whole range of regimes, from the Moorish kingdoms of medieval Spain and the millet system of the Ottoman empire to the contemporary Malaysian state, are acceptable. Indeed (this is a sociological claim) a whole series of regimes, such as Singapore, Japan, and mainland China may fulfill Gray's criteria, which suggests the "real possibility, in the late modern context, of regimes that clearly meet the test of the minimum universal content of morality, and do as well, *or better*, than liberal states on other criteria relevant to human flourishing, without adopting liberal institutions or social norms, and without converging on the universal civilization anticipated in the Enlightenment philosophy of history" (Gray 1997, 83).

To be fair, China comes up somewhat short of Gray's two criteria, due to its handling of Tibet. Even apart from this, Gray's portrayal of these regimes involves, to put it politely, much wishful thinking, prompted by his perhaps desperate search for nonliberal regimes that seem decent. Japan is, or rather has been made into, a relatively ethnically homogeneous society, whose capacity to incorporate serious internal pluralism is questionable. China is an uneasy compromise between repressive authoritarianism and consumer hedonism; Singapore's regime consciously pits itself against the freedom of its subcultures to reproduce themselves. Both have to massively repress their considerable internal diversity and its institutional expression. Gray's depiction of an Asia that is more imaginary than real is almost as curiously distorted as his anti-Americanism. Frequently in the pages of his recent books, America appears as the horror to avoid: a society founded on an experiment with mass incarceration and a polity emblematic of political chaos. The crudity of these judgements is surprising because Gray is, for the most part, an astute political commentator. Readers of his work will find penetrating analyses of a whole range of social and political transformations ranging from the demise of the Soviet Union to the difficulties of Thatcherism in Britain. The world is often reflected in these pages as it seldom is in contemporary political theory, but for all of that, Gray is blind to central features of our political landscape.

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Burdens of Justification

Gray is entirely persuasive that value pluralism has serious ramifications for the way liberalism is justified. But this does less damage than Gray thinks to the *political* appeal and applicability of liberalism, even outside the West. It is an undoubted fact—one that, perhaps, Gray laments—that almost all societies, other than perhaps those held together by extraordinary ideological and coercive repression, are riven by conflict, argument, and dissension. It is an insidious piece of folklore, stemming from Mill and Hegel, that reflexivity and critical questioning are enterprises unique to the modern West. Few societies have been seriously immune from self-doubt, and in many it has often taken radical forms. Conflict arises over what is required to reproduce the way of life a particular community requires, and over what the best intimations of given tradition, or its debilitating weaknesses, are; but it is also frequently occasioned by greater demands for liberty, equality, rights for women, protection from undue social tyranny, and so on—demands that were given their most potent shape by the Enlightenment project that Gray decries. Groups and individuals frequently demand that the restrictions societies impose on their members, the choices they make in the allocation of rights and duties, be justified *to them*. All societies rest on legitimating ideologies of one kind or another; but debate over these justifications, though they vary in degree and intensity, are no longer absent from any society. One need not ascribe this demand to a universal human need, or to a privileging of the prerogatives of choice, but simply to a ubiquitous political reality. Even when the convictions held by members of a collectivity are constitutive attachments, they have implications that members of that community disagree over, or consequences that bear on the well-being of others.

What bearing does value pluralism have on this feature of our political life? Gray, I think, is committed to insisting that demands for justification are often incompatible with value pluralism. Philosophically this is plausible. But politically it is unpersuasive. Suppose any individual or given set of individuals in a culture were to object to the restraints that society imposed upon them. It will hardly do to respond to them by saying, "Sorry, value pluralism allows us not to justify these restraints to you, since any such justification is inconsistent with the existence of incommensurable values." The axiological thesis

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of value pluralism can only render the demands for justification that are ubiquitous in modern politics illegitimate at the cost of treating the persons raising these demands as less than moral agents. It is an important aspect of people's well-being, and their self-conception as agents, that they often hold beliefs and engage in actions that are significant to them for what they regard as *good reasons.* These reasons may range from the value they place on fidelity to the particular histories they have, to loyalty to the authorities they trust, to purely instrumental considerations.

The idea that acting on reasons is a widespread human capacity, and indeed may be definitive of human beings, does not itself rest on any restrictive view of the nature of permissible reasons; nor does it rest on the patently false view that only the examined life is worth living. It describes the political reality of our times and is as applicable to China and Singapore as to the cloisters of Oxford. If the demands for justification are widespread and a feature of almost all societies (the mere existence of dissent would establish this), then the interesting question is: what would regimes that took the burdens of justification seriously look like? My suspicion is that under modern conditions they would look more like liberal societies, with protections of basic liberties, than like the genuinely illiberal societies that Gray condones. The set of basic liberties is not, as Gray rightly insists, unchangeable across all contexts; it will admit of variations in content and meaning. Nor would the burdens of justification be incompatible with a wide variety of pluralistic institutional arrangements (different personal laws for different communities, for example). But it is unlikely that these arrangements could be illiberal to the degree that Gray suggests. In short, the most appropriate *modus vivendi* for resolving conflicts in modern societies may look a lot more like liberalism than Gray allows. In particular, two types of regime endorsed by Gray are ruled out. Premodern empires are not much of an option, even though, as Gray notes, they did often allow for a plurality of cultures. And modern authoritarian states do not, Gray's own claim notwithstanding, allow their populations to express freely the particular commitments of their citizens.

It is the case that in some circumstances, liberalism exercises pressures on recalcitrant minorities to conform. Its substantive conception of justice and its historical reluctance to contemplate a more diverse range of institutional settlements on matters dealing with personal laws and so forth have made it less propitious for a deeper diversity.

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But it is also the case that no system that does not have a set of basic liberties in place is likely to be able provide conditions for expressing the diversity whose contours run through cultures rather than between them.

If this is the case, the liberal project of trying to persuade people that they may have sufficient reason to accept a particular political system is not, as Gray supposes, an incoherent one. What value pluralism points to is the difficulty of finding widely acceptable systems in any particular context, not the moral incoherence of the attempt. Regarding the former difficulty, why prejudge the matter in advance of arguments being enunciated? Gray accuses Rawlsian liberalism of usurping for philosophy what properly belongs to politics, and the somber and authoritative tone of much theorizing in that vein lends credence to that charge. But to press this argument too far is to suggest that a balance of values designed to be persuasive to citizens has no legitimate place in political inquiry. A very odd conclusion for a political theorist.

Is Pluralism Possible?

The Herderian pluralism that Gray defends is a pluralism that is available only from a panoramic view, one that contemplates the mosaic of different cultures from the outside; it is not available to any person living in a given culture, and it is even less helpful in resolving the conflicts these cultures face. It is not an accident that in Herder's account, pluralism was underwritten by providence as a bountiful expression of God's purposes for mankind; Herder has little to say about conflicts and contestation *within* cultures. Gray recognizes, of course, that there are few cultural practices that are not subject to some kind of questioning. The presence of political dissidents, the diversity of interpretations of the central texts of a religion, the demands of women, the allure of rival goods borrowed from other traditions—these are the political realities of our times. And it is difficult to imagine, under modern conditions—where states (especially those that Gray extols, such as China and Singapore) possess such extraordinary power—that something close to liberal protections will not be necessary. That modern citizens might have good reasons to accept something closer to a liberal framework than Gray would allow is an argument that will ultimately have to based on their political realities and

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moral dilemmas. It is unclear what bearing the doctrine of value pluralism has on whether or not such reasons might exist. To suggest that such reasons might exist is not in any way to presuppose the hope that a generic humanity should converge on a universal civilization. It is to put forward a way to give expression to the diverse strivings those cultures stimulate. Some of these strivings, ineluctably, will have their source in the Enlightenment. Gray's reminder that the exercise of liberties does not exhaust the range of achievements important to well-being is worthwhile. But liberalism derives its appeal from elsewhere, from the demands of its citizens to be taken seriously as moral agents.

I do not want to minimize the moral import of Gray's outlook. It is a useful antidote to the universalist teleologies that Gray rightly criticizes; and it is a sensibility that is generous and receptive to the range of human achievement in a way that Millian liberalism cannot be. It is a salutary reminder that fundamental conflicts and indeterminacies are constitutive even of basic principles. It is more political than political liberalism is, in reminding us that politics often begins where reason stops. But for all its attractiveness, it does little to disable the project of trying to discover where shared reasons can take us.

Gray, following Stuart Hampshire, criticizes Rawlsian liberalism for being insufficiently procedural.[2] My own view is that both proceduralism and the Rawlsian (or for that matter Habermasian) enterprise of justification embody legitimate and complementary aspirations. The latter takes seriously the thought that we should try to offer reasons to those with whom we disagree so as to establish the legitimacy of the rules we live by. The former takes seriously the thought that such an agreement may not be forthcoming and that at that point, the appeal to reasons that we all share may beg the question. There does come a point in politics where the authority of the outcome is contingent upon none other than the fact that it emanates from procedures rather than from good reasons. This is a truth that many contemporary liberals acknowledge less than they ought to. There can, of course, be proper dispute over what counts as legitimate and fair procedures. Liberals are rightly accused of sometimes rigging their procedures so that they issue in liberal outcomes. A *modus vivendi* view would have fewer prior restraints. But for all that, it cannot displace the search for reasons that a reflective consciousness demands. It can step in *only* when that search falls short.

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If the demands of reflection impinge upon us all, then the question is under what conditions these demands can be better met. To deny that these demands impinge upon us is to deny the political realities of our time. And to suppose that its demands impinge only upon the West is to commit something akin to the fallacy found in heirs to the Enlightenment such as Mill and Hegel, who supposed that only the West thinks. The only questions, then, are whether we reflect well or poorly, and whether we create conditions that are more propitious to the former rather than the latter. It is difficult to imagine proper reflection without free inquiry, which under modern conditions means something close to liberalism. Since Gray tirelessly misrepresents liberalism, it bears repeating that the need for reflection does not presuppose a particular conception of rationality on which all must converge; nor does it presuppose that only lives that pass the test of reflection are valuable. Nor is reflection without costs: the demands of a reflective consciousness will impinge upon the character and content of many forms of life. This may be felt as an unnecessary imposition. But as Bernard Williams put it, "there is no route back from reflectiveness."[3] One must wonder, therefore, whether value pluralism is even possible for the inhabitants of modern societies.

NOTES

1. For an autonomy-based liberalism see Raz 1986. For trenchant criticism of Raz's justifications of the value of autonomy, see Parekh 1994.
2. For Stuart Hampshire's more admirably unbullying views, see Hampshire 1988.
3. For further reflections along these lines see Williams 1985.

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Richard Boyd

FRANK H. KNIGHT AND ETHICAL PLURALISM

ABSTRACT: *For Frank Knight, the fact that we are free to engage in economic pursuits brings out what is both best and worst in human nature. The same competitive economy that liberates individuals to choose their own desired ends also provides them with socially undesirable wants and fosters habits potentially at odds with the demands of liberal democracy. Given Knight's desire both to defend human liberty and his concession that liberty is likely to be abused, his version of liberalism must of necessity be anticonsequentialist. Paradoxically, Knight's philosophical pluralism—his insistence that there are any number of incommensurable perspectives on the good or just society—underlies both his criticism of the "ethical" possibilities of the competitive order and his defense of human liberty against the dangers of social planning.*

It has become a commonplace to associate the competitive economic system with liberal democracy. Milton Friedman (1962) and Francis Fukuyama (1989) have advanced the positive claim that capitalism and democracy are logically and historically related. Conversely, critics of collectivism such as F. A. Hayek (1976) have suggested an affinity between economic planning and political totalitarianism, a thesis whose historical merits are arguable (Polanyi [1955] 1997), but one that nonetheless possesses a powerful theoretical logic.

Putting aside for now the specifics of these arguments, I wish to suggest that they share a common assumption that bears careful critical

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examination. They presume that economic and political liberty are goods because of their benign consequences. By resting their defense of commerce on its civilizing effects, as did Montesquieu, Hume, Madison, and other "commercial republicans" of an earlier epoch (Hirschman 1977), these latter-day theorists reduce the value of freedom to that of its uses and abuses. They presume that liberty's balance sheet of costs and benefits will demonstrate the unabashedly positive benefits—even the "ethical" merits—of the competitive system. This introduces a consequentialist logic into the intellectual history of liberalism that leaves the defense of the competitive economic order hostage to negative findings about its putative efficiency, its maximization of social welfare, or its presumed affinity for liberal democracy.

The work of Frank H. Knight (1885–1972) stands in an interesting relationship to this body of theory. One of the key figures of the Chicago school of economics and an early and forceful defender of the competitive economic order, Knight nonetheless called into question the grounds on which one could conduct such a defense. In some of his earliest essays, Knight went so far as to assert that the competitive economic order could in no sense be considered "ethically" justifiable. For Knight, the usual classical liberal criteria of efficiency, progress, the maximization of want satisfaction, and an affinity for liberal democracy were insufficient to justify applying the appellation "ethical" to the competitive economic system. In fact, Knight was forced to concede that by these criteria, one might very well be forced to condemn the competitive economy as unjust or unethical. Knight's rejection of consequentialist justifications of the competitive economic order force its would-be defenders to seek another defense of economic liberalism, one that Knight argues must, of necessity, be anticonsequentialist. After exploring this aspect of Knight's thought, I will suggest that his philosophical pluralism motivates both his criticism of the "ethics of competition" and his later anticonsequentialist defense of the free market. Both of these moves are evident in his masterful but neglected essay, "The Ethics of Competition" ([1923] 1935; henceforth, EC).

Philosophical Pluralism as a Criticism of the Market Economy

Coming from one of the central figures of neoclassical economics in the twentieth century and one of the original members of the

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Chicago school, Knight's dissatisfaction with the competitive economic order is unexpected. However, his objections have impressive and equally unlikely precursors in the intellectual history of liberalism.

Despite the promise that they would deliver the wealth, peace, and civility of a "global trading republic," Adam Smith was forced to concede that the laissez-faire economy and the division of labor might also fall short of promoting a robust and dignified human life. Like Knight, Smith struggled to reconcile the competitive order's benign promise of civility and progress with the equal likelihood of its forming men "as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become . . . not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgment concerning many even of the ordinary duties of life" (Smith [1776] 1976, V. 1.3.2, 303). It is tempting to dismiss such complaints as misgivings about an earlier, rougher and tougher capitalism, one in which the inequities of competition appeared destined to relegate some individuals and groups to a permanently subservient status. One might question whether such criticisms remain relevant to a fully developed competitive economy that appears, at least to some observers, to have made good on capitalism's promise of a rising tide that lifts all boats. Perhaps more relevant to our time, Adam Ferguson extended these misgivings even further into a full-blown criticism of the enervating effects of the "luxury" to which commercial societies were prone. He wondered whether "a polished community [might] be compared to a man, who having executed his plan, built his house, and made his settlement; who having, in short, exhausted the charms of every subject, and wasted all his ardour, sinks into languor and listless indifference?" (Ferguson [1781] 1987, V.3,215). And John Stuart Mill, asserting the fundamental incommensurability of "pushpins and poetry," challenged Jeremy Bentham's unwillingness or inability to distinguish between the two, and by implication, criticized a mass society that produced a superabundance of the former and too little of the latter ([1873] 1969, 68–69).

In "The Ethics of Competition," Knight allows us to appreciate that these scattered misgivings amount to more than just a nascent squeamishness toward the capitalist struggle or disdain for mass culture. Indeed, Knight provides a concrete philosophical housing for these objections. In his view, philosophical pluralism opens up such

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familiar concepts as "wealth," "progress," "efficiency," and "maximization" to potential criticism. That is, maximizing the aggregate wealth of a society does not necessarily produce the maximum welfare of its members, let alone justice. While Knight does not articulate this value pluralism in terms of the "agonistic liberalism" recently described by John Gray (1995 and 1996), it is clear that philosophical pluralism colors Knight's work.

Knight begins "The Ethics of Competition" by taking up the economist's usual defense of the competitive economic order. Typically the "economic problem" is thought to consist in "how to employ the existing and available supplies of all sorts of resources, human and material, natural and artificial, in producing the maximum amount of want-satisfaction . . ." (EC, 34). Simply to assume that the competitive economic system is the one best able to satisfy this goal is what Knight calls the "familiar ethical conclusion of apologetic economics" (ibid., 49). But economic "efficiency" is not, as apologetic economists assume, a factual category, but an evaluative and hence value-laden one (ibid., 42):

> It is impossible to form any concept of "social efficiency" in the absence of some general measure of value. Even in physics and engineering, "efficiency" is strictly a value category; there is no such thing as mechanical efficiency. . . . The efficiency of any machine means the ratio between the *useful* output and the total output. . . . In so complicated a problem as that of social efficiency, where the elements of outlay and of return are both infinitely numerous and diverse, it is no wonder that the process of valuation has become the heart and core of the study. It must ultimately be recognized that only within rather narrow limits can human conduct be interpreted as the creation of values of such definiteness and stability that they can serve as scientific data, that life is fundamentally an exploration in the field of values itself and not a mere matter of producing given values. (Ibid., 42–43)

If "efficiency" represents the measure of "useful" output, reflecting a judgment of what is desirable, then the problem of economics becomes philosophical or ethical, rather than mechanical or mathematical. Knight's assessment presents the economist with a new task, one to which his scientific assumption of value neutrality is unsuited. We must, in fact, make difficult decisions among competing values. In effect we must choose between a society that values pushpins or poetry, or in contemporary terms, one that values consumerism or citizen-

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ship, piety or hedonism, spotted owls or logging. However, these decisions do not in and of themselves establish the superiority of one scale of valuation to another. There is no single set of values by which "efficiency" can be evaluated.

The decision to lower tariffs on cars, for instance, represents not merely a decision in favor of efficiency, narrowly construed, but a decision to value the interests of non-American car manufacturers and American consumers over American car manufacturers. The decision to levy sin taxes on cigarettes or pornography is not just a departure from economic efficiency. It also reflects a value judgment about a way of life that should be condoned. Doing nothing also reflects a value judgment: namely one in favor of the status quo (Knight [1947] 1982, 82–83).

Knight's criticism of the standard view of efficiency seems to apply most fundamentally to exchanges between individuals. A particular act of exchange may be the best possible in terms of maximizing the satisfaction of the two parties, and hence be said to maximize efficiency, but it may also be objectionable in terms of ethical, aesthetic, or political values. That is, an individual who burns bibles in exchange for drugs, one who sells his citizenship for money, or one who trades a Monet for comic books, may very well have completed an exchange whose economic efficiency (by definition) cannot be questioned: he and his partner in exchange have maximized their want satisfaction. However, ethical, political, or aesthetic values may not so much trump as qualify and constrain the market's reductively hedonistic scale of pleasure and pain maximization.

While illustrative, however, this individualistic way of framing the difficulty of value pluralism actually carries us further away from Knight's own point. Like the institutionalist critics of neoclassical economic theory, Knight was concerned to demonstrate precisely how individual value preferences are not given and constant, as neoclassical theory must presume, but rather are endogenous products of activity within the economic system (EC, 46, 49, 51). They are social products. We do not confront the market economy with a preordained checklist of desires we wish to achieve. Rather, as Knight repeatedly insists, we act in order to discover what we truly desire (ibid., 35). For better or worse, the competitive market as a social system is all too ready to supply us with new desires and ambitions, as both consumers and producers. Much of Knight's work was devoted to challenging the empirical tenability of the neoclassical model of

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Homo economicus, the individual with wants in hand. Knight contrasted this theoretical construct with the reality of a world in which families, firms, social groups, and nations are the real and effective actors (ibid., 49–58).

While it is true that individuals undertake decisions in which they "economically" weight competing alternatives, in another, deeper sense, their values are the product of activity within a plurality of spheres of social life. Thus, decisions among competing options represent not so much the weighing of alternatives according to a common measure of utility, but "agonistic" choice in a pluralistic universe among competing ethical scalars: "We cannot accept want-satisfaction as a final criterion of value because we do not in fact regard our wants as final; instead of resting in the view that there is no disputing about tastes, we dispute about them more than anything else; our most difficult problem in valuation is the evaluation of our wants themselves and our most troublesome want is the desire for wants of the 'right' kind" (EC, 42). The nagging question as to which ones are the "right" kind of wants must lead us to wonder whether the market, either in practice or in theory, is likely to arrive at a tolerable approximation.

Max Weber described our plurality of orientations as "spheres" that require us to undertake difficult decisions among incommensurable values (Weber [1918] 1947, 151; Weber [1915] 1947). As Knight puts it, we must choose between the conflicting duties of religion, economic maximization, family membership, and citizenship, to name only a few, "between which philosophy has so far built no adequate thought bridges" (Knight [1947] 1982, 274–78). These pluralities of orientation entail different, inevitably conflicting demands. Hence, actions undertaken to satisfy one scale of valuation—in particular, the economic—are properly open to evaluation from any of the others. Conscientious objectors, satisfying the demands of their role as religionists, for instance, may be open to condemnation in light of their status as citizens. Satisfied in his role as the maximizer of pleasure and minimizer of pain, *Homo economicus* may be liable to criticism in his role as community member, friend, or family member. Aristotle captured this difficulty succinctly when he declared that the "good man" (not coincidentally, the leader of the *oikos* or economic household) is rarely identical with the "good citizen"; he therefore urged a situational ethics that takes into account the need to make difficult choices among suboptimal outcomes (*Politics* 1276b).

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According to Knight, however, the fact that we *do* make decisions every day between competing moral imperatives does not in any way render those decisions commensurable. They remain open to critical judgment according to any number of competing scalars of value. The fact that we can never definitively say which among competing values ought to be chosen, conversely, does not mitigate Knight's belief that there are indeed a number of independent evaluative standpoints against which we can criticize both individual acts and societal outcomes. The fact that individuals do choose to value everything from genocide and bestiality to tacky clothing and bad novels does not prevent us from judging these activities critically. As William Galston (1991), Judith Shklar (1989, 29), Nancy Rosenblum (1989), and other pluralists have recently observed, it is extremely difficult for us to come to a consensus about a single objective good that we all "ought" to esteem. Yet this apparent plurality of notions of the good does not prevent us from coming to a more or less intuitionist notion of the bad or undesirable.

Why doesn't this plurality of "oughts" collapse into utter value relativism? If each of us possesses one or more imperatives that we regard as having unique normative force, how can our disagreements be adjudicated? Knight answers that the presence of one or more conflicting ethical imperatives in any situation does not preclude the possibility that there is a "better"—but not a "best"—solution. Value, the economist Carl Menger wrote, "is a judgment economising men make about the importance of goods at their disposal for the maintenance of their lives and well-being" ([1871] 1981, 121). For "economising men," one could just as well substitute "religious men," "political men," "family members," or "romantic men," yielding different and incommensurable imperatives. Each of these roles must be seen not only as possessing a moral claim, but as requiring tradeoffs along other moral dimensions. Philosophical pluralism has most often been accused of being a defense of limitless toleration. Explicitly or implicitly, pluralists appear concerned to emphasize the "partial" correctness of any course of action or way of life. Joseph Raz, to the contrary, has observed the critical potential of philosophical pluralism. If any of a subset of justifiable actions appears partially justified, there is also an accompanying loss, and hence a critical dimension:

> Value-pluralism is the doctrine . . . which takes the plurality of valuable activities and ways of life to be ultimate and ineliminable. This

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> radically changes our understanding of pluralism. On a reductive-monistic view when one trades the pleasures (and anxieties) of a family life for a career as a sailor one is getting, or hoping to get the same thing one is giving up, be it happiness, pleasure, desire-satisfaction, or something else. . . . If value pluralism is correct this view is totally wrong. What one loses is of a different kind than one gains. Even in success there is a loss. . . . (Raz 1994, ch. 6)

Knight emphasizes this critical flip-side of the usual, exculpatory understanding of philosophical pluralism.

But how do we mediate among these competing values, and what is the consequence of this ethical pluralism for capitalism? By this point it should be no surprise that Knight's message is mixed. Knight's early work clearly focuses on the negative side of philosophical pluralism—the side, that is, that establishes the ground for an independent ethical criticism of the free market. However, it is important to understand what Knight does *not* imply by his denial of the "ethical" character of the competitive economic order.

First, the existence of one or more independent critical perspectives does not imply that we can ever know which of these viewpoints is right. Hence we should be cautious in privileging one view over others: the tendency toward skepticism flows from Knight's refusal to concede that we can determine which view is "best."

Second, even if we were able to determine that a particular aspect of the competitive order is "unethical," this does not imply that we ought to act, individually or collectively, to rectify it. For instance, Knight would argue that even if we as a society, acting in our political and ethical guise, determine that advertising and consumerism are morally reprehensible, this does not mean that we should intervene or regulate to prevent them. Indeed, Knight's moral theory further implies that we should not do so, as will be seen below.

This equivocation does not equal optimism. Insofar as our wants are produced by advertising and consumerism, Knight's skepticism about capitalism would seem almost boundless. Emphasizing the social character of the economic system, Knight underscores the degree to which our wants, desires, and values are given to us by the economic system. Initially, these observations are directed toward a radical criticism of classical liberalism.

Knight was vehemently opposed, to be sure, to Thorstein Veblen, John R. Commons, C. E. Ayres, and other institutionalist critics who

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fixated on the competitive economy's seemingly boundless multiplication of petty wants (EC, 51–52). This hostility has led several commentators to miss the deeper similarities between Knight's work and that of the institutionalists. Like them, he argued that the social character of the competitive system insures that in many cases, the outcome of competition rests out of the hands of the individual. Observe the case of the farmer who works hard one year and earns a good living, while another year he starves, through no fault of his own, after putting forth the same or more effort. Can he be said to be less deserving of success? Yet the acceleration of competition to a national and even global scale yields an extended order in which the impact of any individual decision or initiative must be even further diluted. On the other hand, Knight cites the example of those who, through no effort of their own, are merely born with a talent, no matter how frivolous, that society happens to value. How is it right that these individuals prosper while many of society's hardest working, who are not so blessed, do not? Knight's notion of the "ethical" is that of common-sense Judeo-Christianity, in the sense of "just deserts": "The most vital ministrations become valueless if offered in superabundance, and the most trivial performance becomes exceedingly valuable if sufficiently unique and rare, as when a human monstrosity satisfies an economic demand by letting people look at him" (EC, 57). How can competition be "ethical" when the hardworking and the moral seem so rarely to be among those who finish first, Knight wonders?

Effort, ability, and luck are the three components of economic success (EC, 63). Yet it is only the first of these that can be dignified with the judgment of "ethical." We "deserve" only that which we have earned for ourselves. Yet wealth earned in this fashion, purely by individual effort alone, is all too rare. While it may not be unethical for us to inherit wealth or to blunder into a lucky business venture, Knight's point is that these very common aspects of the competitive system seem to entail an individual and collective outcome that is less than worthy of the term "ethical." Compounded, this outcome leads to a society where inherited wealth and advantage predominate: "Where the family is the social unit, the inheritance of wealth, culture, educational advantages, and economic opportunities tend toward the progressive increase of inequality" (ibid., 50).

His recognition of the social dimension of economic exchange explains Knight's dissatisfaction with the neoclassical theory of price.

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Even in theory, he argues, market prices can only at best approximate real social value:

> The product or contribution is always measured in terms of price, which does not correspond closely with ethical values or human significance. The money value of a product is a matter of the "demand," which in turn reflects the tastes and purchasing power of the buying public and the availability of substitute commodities. All these factors are largely created and controlled by the workings of the economic system itself. Hence their results can have in themselves no ethical significance. (EC, 55)

We are therefore compelled to look beyond objective measures of scarcity and demand. Instead Knight would have us turn our attention to the competitive economy as a social system where prices and wages are equally a function of social evaluations and wants produced within the competitive economy. These, in turn, are based not on factual or objective standards that are ethically justifiable, but rather on "taste," with all its arbitrariness. Prices and wages are a matter of "giving the public what it wants," which "usually means corrupting popular taste" (ibid., 57).

Competition and Liberal Democracy

Thus far we have seen that elements of Knight's thought lead us toward a radical reconsideration of familiar defenses of the competitive system on grounds of efficiency and the maximization of social good. What then of other claims commonly put forward on its behalf? Can Knight's account of the tendencies of competition be understood to support "progress," in the broadest sense, or the institutions and practices of liberal democracy, more narrowly?

At first glance, this does not seem to be the case. Knight appreciates that the values inculcated by the competitive economic system may not be those needed to sustain liberal democratic institutions. Of Albert Hirschman's two "rival views" of the affinity between market society and liberal democracy (Hirschman 1986), Knight certainly falls into the less sanguine camp.

Again Knight begins with the plurality of orientations in human social life: we are at once producers, consumers, citizens, religionists, family members. Due to this plurality, the value orientations and

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habits we acquire in one of our roles will likely shape our values in other spheres of life. Regardless of its historical merits, Max Weber's achievement in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* was to suggest the degree to which our action as religionists may be more fundamental than our wants and desires as producers and consumers, to the extent that the former may have shaped the latter (Weber [1930] 1976). Not coincidentally, given his rigorous study and immense admiration of Weber, Knight observed a similar relationship between economy and polity. Thus, he feared that the behaviors and values sanctioned by competition in the economic sphere may corrode those values needed to sustain liberal institutions. By allowing and even encouraging our preferences as consumers and producers to overwhelm our duties as citizens, the modern competitive economy is at least potentially at odds with liberal democracy.

At various moments in his corpus, Knight accuses the competitive order of inculcating habits of individualism, privatism, moral degeneracy, disrespect for the rule of law, meanness, greed, and sickness (EC, 50, 66; Knight [1974] 182, 440 and passim.). Several decades before Edward Banfield's (1958) pathbreaking study of the "moral economy of a backward society," Knight had already begun to underscore the social preconditions of the competitive economy. The economic system not only depends on moral capital—the family, respect for the rule of law, and trust—as Putnam (1993) and Fukuyama (1995) have recently affirmed, but the economy also potentially undermines these values. And just as the competitive economic order owes its development and perpetuation to an extant supply of moral capital, so, too, does liberal democracy. Without habits of law-abidingness, civility, empathy, trust, and mutual respect, liberal institutions seem doomed.

Like Adam Ferguson before him, Knight foresees a time when the historical affinity between liberal democracy and capitalism will break down. The combination of tremendous wealth and extreme inequality, unscrupulous habits, disenchantment, individualism, the debasement of taste, and the conflicts bred by capitalism may conspire to undermine once and for all the premodern social capital upon which liberal institutions depend. In such a situation, the adversarial relationship between capitalism and liberal democracy would be revealed. Knight fears that the competitive economic system may very well have been too successful at achieving its professed goals. Unlike earlier critics of the competitive order who called attention to the fact that the market rarely functioned according to the pure neoclas-

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sical model, Knight further argues that even if it did, it would still not qualify as ethical. A pure market society might well succeed in maximally satisfying the wants of its members, but those wants themselves may be subject to ethical criticism. A perfect market society that wholly satisfied the debased desires of its members for perfidy, vice, and domination—desires, Knight adds, that modern capitalist society seems at least to sanction if not to inculcate—might very well be efficient, but it can hardly be deemed ethical. Satisfying a greater quantity of degraded wants is hardly more desirable than imperfectly achieving a more confined set of values we might agree to be ethical. Once again, it is not the quantity of wants, or the "efficiency" with which the competitive order permits their satisfaction, but rather the "quality" of wants by which we should evaluate any given economic system: "We have commented enough on the fact that the social order largely forms as well as gratifies the wants of its members, and the natural consequence that it must be judged ethically rather by the wants which it generates, the type of character which it forms in its people, than by its efficiency in satisfying wants as they exist at any given time" (EC, 51).

Another problem is pluralism itself, which exists, for Knight, not as a normative goal but as an inescapable and, in some respects, unfortunate aspect of the human condition. On the one hand, the presence of different and incommensurable views of justice and the good life ensures that there will naturally be a variety of competing ethical perspectives, each partially true, and hence a rich, ongoing, and irresolvable conversation (Knight [1947] 1982, 280, 462). However, faced with the ultimate incommensurability of these values, there is a perennial danger that the conversation will devolve into the proposition of "agree with me or fight" (Knight 1949). In politics as in economic life, "persuasion" overwhelms discussion (EC, 298–300, 322–23). The competitive order, with its emphasis on victory as an end, threatens to override the more fitting understanding of democracy as a conversation undertaken for its own sake. These new attitudes the competitive system inculcates, as well as the older traditions it undermines, may finally yield a society no longer able to sustain liberal institutions.

In fairness, Knight also recognizes the developmental potential of the market order. Uniquely modern habits of civility weigh heavily on the positive side of the balance sheet ([1947] 1982, 206). However, unlike John Stuart Mill, who interpreted pluralism as the necessary

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and sufficient condition for progress, and for whom history was essentially a linear movement upward from barbarism to civility, Knight inherits from Max Weber a more qualified pessimism. Progress, according to this view, is a double-edged sword. Capitalism and liberal democracy are not linked in an uncomplicated partnership, but rather confront one another as at least potentially antinomous opposites.

Knight's skepticism is therefore more complex than a merely lapsarian view of history. The fate of liberal society lies perilously situated between rationalistic disenchantment and the erosion of benign traditions, on the one side, and fanatical irrationalism and antirationalism, on the other (EC, 320–23). The very traditions upon which liberal society depends—for example, the family, civility, and respect for rule of law—are undermined by its rationalism and skepticism; yet these traditions, as originally inherited, remain barbarous and in need of perfection. In light of this delicate balancing act, the prospects for democratic governance and freedom seem necessarily bleak.

Beyond a Liberalism of Consequences

Thus far I have considered the ways Knight's understanding of philosophical pluralism challenges common attempts to conceive of the competitive order as efficient, ethical, progressive, or indeed, even as amenable to liberal democracy. I have been faithful to the logic of Knight's essay, if not to the larger spirit of his work. For Knight should be understood as a defender and not an enemy of the competitive system, even if his work forces us to reconsider the basis for our acceptance of freedom as a value. Thus, one must find some way to reconcile Knight's early critique of capitalism with his later emphatic defense of the market order. It is to his philosophical pluralism that we must once again turn in order to resolve this conundrum. Knight's understanding of philosophical pluralism makes him in the end a friend of economic and social liberty, even if his friendship is tempered by criticism.

Hayek has suggested that the most unappreciated dimension of liberty is the sense in which it resembles play undertaken for its own sake, with no predetermined end or goal. In a brief appendix to *The Fatal Conceit*, Hayek calls for a study of freedom as play and mentions Knight as one who went some distance in this direction (Hayek 1988, 145). I wish to argue that Knight's notion of freedom as "play" bears

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directly on his understanding of value pluralism, and finally stands at the heart of his anticonsequentialist defense of liberty.

This defense of freedom is most evident in Knight's recurrent analogy of human social action to a competitive game. In his treatment of the play element in human affairs, Knight underscores the oxymoronic character of a game in which the outcomes are determined in advance, one in which the hand of the state—or the monopolistic superiority of a single player—becomes so heavy as to destroy the spontaneous essence of the activity. Like political discussion, the economic game should ideally assume the model of a "spontaneous," playful "game" or "conversation." Its very nature or essence is destroyed by external direction or by subjecting it to criteria of relevance which are not its own.

In the often-neglected second subsection of "The Ethics of Competition" Knight argues that one reason it is a mistake to regard the primary function of the competitive system as merely the most efficient allocation of goods or as the maximization of consumption is that "we are impelled to look for ends in the economic process itself, other than the mere consumption of the produce, and to give thoughtful consideration to the possibilities of participation in economic activity as a sphere of self-expression and creative achievement" (EC, 59). Although in modern times the competitive system tends to become the only game in town, and therefore to command the participation of reluctant players (EC, 66), Knight also suggests that something fundamentally human is involved in playing the game, and that our deepest sense of being comes out of playing merely for the sake of play. This notion of freedom as play compels Knight to posit the value of the individual as an end in himself. And that, in turn, leads Knight toward a broader defense of capitalism.

Knight argues that economic planning will lead directly to totalitarianism, as the state transgresses on the integral way of life of individuals. Because economic man is but a fiction, any serious effort to instantiate economic equality requires that one take over the family (Knight [1947] 1982, 84–86, 145–47). State activity putatively restrained to merely "economic" concerns leads to a violation of familial or private concerns. This understanding of the philosophical pluralism characteristic of human social life demonstrates at a more fundamental level the mechanism underlying Hayek's *Road to Serfdom*. Because of the very nature of human things, the pursuit of economic control blurs into other forms of social control.

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State intervention in economic life is to be avoided not because it is philosophically or ethically unjustifiable, but because it must by its very nature produce oblique and unintended consequences. Justice is unlikely to be achieved by the competitive economy. But it is equally unlikely that "reform," as Knight terms efforts to achieve justice, will actually achieve justice; and it is concretely impossible that any measure of justice will ever be achieved without some cost in freedom.

Knight's defense of liberalism finally resembles his defense of economic action as play, demanding individual autonomy as an end in itself, regardless of consequences, and respecting the individual as an ethical value in her own right. As Knight insists, "even doing what is actually good, under authoritative command, is contrary to the ideal of the moral life" ([1947] 1982, 472).

* * *

As partisans of the competitive order have observed, competition may very well foster human beings who are (relatively) pacific, self-reliant, innovative, and rational. However, the question Knight's pluralism forces us to pose is: are these human characteristics always desirable, and what are the costs of their development? Even if we concede that the competitive economy might succeed in fostering *Homo economicus*, would such an individual be a good friend, citizen, husband, or religionist (Knight [1947] 1982, 405–408)? As Michael Oakeshott (1991) has similarly observed in his devastating criticism of "rationalism," one must always ask: "Rational"—or "efficient"—with regard to what?

A defense of the competitive order based solely on its consequences faces insurmountable objections from any number of ethical standpoints. His recognition of this fact propels Knight toward an "anticonsequentialist" liberalism of a very different variety than that espoused by his contemporaries and legatees, a defense of freedom that (ironically, given Knight's anti-Christian bias) has much more in common with Augustinian Christianity than it does with the Enlightenment. Unlike Adam Smith, F. A. Hayek, Milton Friedman, and other economic liberals, who defend freedom on the consequentialist ground of the benefits of progress, development, and economic efficiency, Knight ultimately has little faith that freedom will pave the way for anything other than its own abuse. At a dark moment in his life, he was forced to concede that humanity just might not be up to

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the task of self-government; that the liberal revolution's emphasis on freedom might very well have been premature.

Instead, Knight justifies freedom on the low but solid ground of the Christian dignity of "free will." Freedom is embraced as an ultimate value, not out of an intellectually dishonest anticipation of its benign consequences, but rather from what Knight describes as a mere "faith" that the best life consists in being free to aspire and to fail, and that any society that extinguishes this possibility of dignity is not worth defending ([1947] 1982, 471–73). Struggling with a related dilemma in Knight's thought, James Buchanan (1987, 73) has concluded that the autonomous individual remains the ultimate value in Knight's system, potentially at odds with Knight's pluralist emphasis on the social basis and ethical limits of the competitive order. However, by revealing how Knight's pluralism prompts both his consequentialist criticism and anticonsequentialist defense of the competitive order, we may have gone some distance toward reconciling this apparent tension.

Knight's pluralism is a satisfying but problematic alternative to contemporary debates over liberalism, in which apologists for liberalism—economic and philosophical—square off against antiliberal or critical theory that conflates liberalism with its economistic caricatures. On the negative side, Knight's observations seem to validate many objections to liberalism: a hypertrophic emphasis on liberty leads directly to the "sickness of liberal society"; economic liberalism erodes the premodern capital that sustains it; and with its focus on individuals, liberal philosophy ignores the family and the higher values of communal life (Knight [1947] 1982, esp. 471–73). On the other hand, the individual remains for Knight an end in herself. In light of Knight's arguments, we may still embrace freedom as a value. But we must do so without the familiar comfort of consequentialist illusions.

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Michael Allen Gillespie

NIETZSCHE AND THE PREMODERNIST CRITIQUE OF POSTMODERNITY

ABSTRACT: *The crisis of modern reason culminates in Nietzsche's proclamation of nihilism. Drawing upon Nietzsche, postmodernists suggest that reason itself is defective, while "premodernists" argue we can regain our balance by returning to premodern rationalism. Peter Berkowitz suggests, however, that Nietzsche is a contradictory thinker who fails in his attempt to combine ancient rationalism with modern voluntarism. Postmodernism thus rests upon a defective foundation. Berkowitz's critique of postmodernism is telling, but he does not recognize dangerous millenarian elements in Nietzsche's thought. Moreover, the concept of ancient reason he holds up as an alternative is underdeveloped and undifferentiated.*

Modern thought from the time of Bacon and Descartes has been characterized by the assumption that reason properly understood and applied can rule the world. Knowledge, in this view, is thus power: the power to make man master and possessor of nature. This is the fundamental faith that characterized the Enlightenment. But, of course, it was never universally accepted. Rousseau and Swift, for example, believed that the focus on the mastery of nature rather than the mastery of one's own passions and desires fostered moral decline.

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Such attacks did not call modern reason itself into question but did point out the disastrous consequences of its universal application. More troubling for the Enlightenment notion of reason was Hume's skeptical attack on the concept of causality essential to Newtonian science. Hume's attack, however, was itself limited, for it called into question only apodictic and not empirical science.

In attempting to defend Newtonian science against Humean skepticism and demonstrate that such a science was compatible with human freedom and morality, it was Kant who inadvertently struck the greatest blow against Enlightenment rationalism. Kant believed that both science and morality could only be preserved if the limits of reason were properly understood and observed. A thorough critique of reason itself was thus necessary. The problem, as Kant saw it, was that reason inevitably comes into contradiction with itself when it tries to extend itself beyond its proper sphere. The solution to these antinomies of reason is to recognize that one form of reason (pure reason or understanding) rules the natural or phenomenal world, another (practical reason) the moral or noumenal world, and that this duality of reason is not rooted in the nature of things themselves but in the fact that we experience the world always only in and through consciousness. The contradiction thus lies only in consciousness, in us, and not in the things themselves.

Kant's transcendental idealism was designed to save the modern project. For Kant's successors, however, this "solution" to the problem of modern reason is not only not a solution, it radically exacerbates the problem, for it establishes the source of the antinomies in consciousness and thus in reason itself. It was Kant's articulation of the necessary contradiction of reason with itself that sparked the crisis of modern reason, the view that reason does not and cannot rule the world, that the world in its heart of hearts is chaotic and incomprehensible.

Kant's successors, particularly Hegel, sought to resolve this apparent contradiction between nature and freedom on an Idealist foundation by demonstrating the dialectical unity of consciousness (*Bewusstsein*) with itself as the unity of knowing (*Wissen*) and being (*Sein*). What is, is always only in and through consciousness. The experience of consciousness is the growing recognition of this fact. Reason in this way comes to recognize that it is all of reality. Partial or incomplete knowledge (*Wissen*) thereby becomes absolute knowledge or science (*Wissenschaft*) through a process of dialectical or historical develop-

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ment. Science in this way is reconfigured on a historical foundation. In the view of Hegel and his successors, the solution to the apparent contradictions of modern reason that Kant articulated was thus to be found in historical reason.

While the speculative breadth and depth of this philosophic enterprise are undeniable, so is its failure. In part this is certainly due to the amazing success of empirical (as opposed to idealist or romantic) natural science in the later nineteenth century, but it is also clearly the result of the obscurity of the speculative synthesis that grounded the entire Hegelian enterprise. On the practical level, the failure of the political revolutions of 1848 seriously called into question the belief that historical progress had brought us to the point where the rational is actual and the actual is rational. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, there was thus an ever-growing awareness that historical reason produced only perspectivism and relativism, and thus could not solve the crisis of modern reason.

One of those who most profoundly experienced and explored the crisis from this new, anti-Idealist perspective was Friedrich Nietzsche. He, like many other nineteenth-century thinkers, was deeply troubled by Kant's antinomies. He also recognized that this doctrine had been vastly extended by Schopenhauer, who asserted that it was not merely ideas in our heads but the world as such that was everywhere and always in contradiction with itself. The overarching order that European thinkers since Plato had imagined to characterize existence was thus a lie. The truth of the matter, as Nietzsche understood it, was that God is dead and that all the eternal truths based upon a belief in this God are untenable. While this was not yet widely recognized, Nietzsche was convinced that it soon would be, and that it would produce a "long plenitude and sequence of breakdown, destruction, ruin, and cataclysm, . . . a gloom and an eclipse of the sun whose like has probably never yet occurred on earth." (Nietzsche 1967, V 2, 255) The crisis of Enlightenment reason that Kant initiated thus produced what Nietzsche eventually came to call nihilism. The twentieth century has in large measure accepted Nietzsche's description of this crisis and its consequences.

From one perspective such a nihilistic rejection of reason appears ludicrous. After all, there have been great strides toward fulfilling the original promise that scientific reason would make man master and possessor of nature. And yet, precisely at the moment when science has increased human power beyond anything hitherto imaginable, we

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are struck by the realization that it does not and cannot provide any guidance for human life. Moreover, we are also brought face to face with the possibility that the hegemony of modern reason actually undermines human well-being. Science not only produces powerful implements of destruction that endanger human life as a whole, it also subjects the human beings whom it was suppose to serve to new forms of discipline and order within the structure of world technology. Such suspicions of science and technology are in part a response to the political and social disasters of the first half of our century that have increasingly dissipated as our century has come to a close, but they are not only a reaction to external events; they are rooted in our experience of the contradictions in reason itself.

Nietzsche as Pivotal Thinker

While there is considerable (although by no means unanimous) agreement about the nature of this problem within twentieth-century thought, there is sharp disagreement about how to solve it. Various thinkers have made the attempt to resolve the problem on modern grounds.[1] Among those who have found these modern solutions untenable, two views have emerged. The dominant view is that we must accept the collapse of reason and learn to live in a world of contingency and difference. This is the view of postmodernism, prominently represented by thinkers such as Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Richard Rorty, and William Connolly, among others. This view rests upon the premise already articulated by Nietzsche that philosophy since the time of Plato has rested on principles of identity and non-contradiction that are, in fact, poetic fictions that, by their very nature, are self-undermining. The crisis of modern reason is thus only the manifestation of the crisis of all reason, and a solution to this problem can only be found by moving beyond reason itself. A second, minority view, suggests that the crisis of reason is not a crisis of reason as such but only a crisis of modern reason, of reason as it has been conceived perhaps since Machiavelli or at least since Bacon and Descartes. Ancient rationalism, in this view, rests upon a radically different foundation, and it continues to offer a humane alternative that can provide guidance for us in the midst of our nihilistic age. We might call this position premodernism. It is represented in varying (and often antagonistic) ways by such thinkers as

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Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Carl Löwith, among others.

Nietzsche plays a central role in this debate. Nietzsche's earliest interpreters thought of him as an antimetaphysical thinker who was trying to establish a new mythology (Bertram 1918; Obenauer 1924). This view of Nietzsche played an important role in the development and success of Fascist and Nazi ideology (Sluga 1993; Aschheim 1992). In a series of lectures in the 1930s, Martin Heidegger challenged this view, arguing that while Nietzsche may have ventured in this direction, his thinking was ultimately as metaphysical as that of Plato (Heidegger 1961). As these lectures worked their way into public awareness, Heidegger's vision of a philosophically consistent Nietzsche came to play an increasingly important role along side the view of Nietzsche as Fascist ideologue. As a result, beginning in the 1950s, Nietzsche's thought began to regain philosophical legitimacy. Typical of this view in the English-speaking world was Walter Kaufmann's *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (1950). The "philosophical" (and, in the American context, often "positivistic") Nietzsche, however, gave way to a more radical, postmodern Nietzsche in the 1960s. Gilles Deleuze's *Nietzsche et la philosophie* (1962) gave the first and definitive articulation of the postmodernist reading of Nietzsche. This work was followed by a series of others that produced the so-called "New Nietzsche" (Allison 1977). These works included Pierre Klossowski's *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux* (1969), Sarah Kofman's *Nietzsche et la métaphor* (1972), Bernard Pautrat's *Versions du soleil* (1971), Jean-Michel Rey's *L'enjeu des signes* (1971), and Jacques Derrida's *Éperons* (1978). This view of Nietzsche has been taken up in the American context in such works as Richard Rorty's *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1985), Alexander Nehamas's *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (1985), and Mark Warren's *Nietzsche and Political Thought* (1988).

The postmodern Nietzsche bears some resemblance to the earliest, antimetaphysical Nietzsche, but in the postmodernist reading he is shorn both of his mythologizing and of his political conservatism. Indeed, in Deleuze's work he is brought forth to do battle with the Marxist Hegelianism of the Old Left in support of the liberationist program that became central to the New Left. Nietzsche, as postmodernists see him, is a thinker—indeed, the first thinker—to try to think beyond a philosophy of identity, the first thinker to realize that every assertion is self-undermining and to develop a way of philosophizing that is constantly aware of this fact.[2] For postmodernists,

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Nietzsche recognizes that the crisis of modernity is a crisis of the metaphysics of identity, and he points out the path that leads to a new philosophy and a democratic politics of difference. He teaches us that we always understand the world only from a particular perspective and that there is thus no truth per se, but only a variety of truths. Life is thus a poetic project of making, and the highest form of this making is the making of reason itself. All concepts are lies, "dream bridges," as Nietzsche puts it in *Zarathustra*, "between things that remain eternally apart" (Nietzsche 1967, VI 1, 268). All order and meaning are created or constructed by human beings. Each creation is the imposition of an identity that falsifies and limits reality. All concepts are forms of discipline and hence limitations on human freedom. The goal of human life is to deconstruct these concepts and identities in order to liberate human beings from the tyranny of words, from the logocentrism of Western thought. As radically finite and thus perspectival beings, we must recognize that no authority can be grounded in truth, and that the only legitimate political alternative is to accept the differences among us, enter into dialogue with one another, and profit and grow from the experience of these differences.

The problems with such a reading of Nietzsche are numerous. First and foremost, Nietzsche's formulation of his central doctrines of the will to power and the eternal recurrence in metaphysical and at times quasi-scientific terms in his published works and (more fully) in his *Nachlass* call into question the postmodernist assertion that Nietzsche is an anti-metaphysical thinker. Revealing the metaphysical core of Nietzsche's thought was an essential goal of Heidegger's *Nietzsche*, and while one may have doubts about many aspects of his reading of Nietzsche, his case for a metaphysical Nietzsche is strong. Additionally, Nietzsche's insistence upon the centrality of hierarchy or rank order calls into question postmodernism's radically democratic interpretation of his thought. A similar problem arises as a result of his deployment of bipolar distinctions such as noble and base, weak and strong, healthy and unhealthy, which seem to reinscribe the coercive orders that postmodernism wants to deny.

Nonetheless, Nietzsche has been viewed with suspicion by those who seek to revitalize premodern alternatives. Alasdair MacIntyre, for example, declares that the choice before us is a choice between Aristotle and Nietzsche (MacIntyre 1984). For Leo Strauss the alternative is Plato or Nietzsche. For those who pursue premodern alternatives, the choice is between a true rationalism of the sort found in ancient

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or Christian thinkers and the poetic constructivism of Nietzsche. In this respect Nietzsche is seen as an ardent defender of poetry in its eternal struggle against philosophy, a soldier in Homer's army, to paraphrase Stanley Rosen (1996, xi). For these thinkers, Nietzsche's thought is not an alternative to modernity but only the latest version of modern reason, which has always understood knowing as making or technology.

Berkowitz's Reading of Nietzsche

What has been missing until now is an explicit critique of Nietzsche from the premodern perspective. This is the goal of Peter Berkowitz's *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995). It is essentially a Platonic critique of Nietzsche, and thus goes a long way toward filling a large gap in the current debate about Nietzsche and modernity.

For Plato, as he has been traditionally understood, the principal ontological distinction is the difference between being and becoming. True knowledge, in Plato's view, is knowledge of the unchanging, of being as such, and the pursuit of such knowledge is philosophy. Becoming is unknowable, and our "knowledge" of becoming is always only opinion. Poetry and the other arts, however, make a claim to grasp the truth of becoming and to reproduce it in speech, or stone, or sound. The activity by which artists come to "know" is in Greek *poiesis*, 'making', from which we derive the word 'poetry'. The decisive question from a Platonic point of view is whether being or becoming is preeminent and thus whether *poiesis* is subordinate to philosophy or vice versa. Plato, at least as represented by the positions defended by Socrates in the dialogues, believes that philosophy is and should be preeminent.[3] The postmodernists' Nietzsche is the foremost advocate of becoming and of poetry, and thus the greatest opponent of Plato and the philosophy of being.

From the postmodernist point of view, there is only becoming. Being is just a dream or a rhetorical gesture. There is no knowledge of the unchanging because there is nothing that is unchanging. All thinking is thus essentially creative and constructivist. Berkowitz questions whether this view was shared by Nietzsche, and he contends, moreover, that it is incoherent, since it could only be made intelligible on the basis of real knowledge that is not made but discov-

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ered. Even if Nietzsche does in fact attempt to defend such a position, then, the very act of expressing and defending it would involve him in a performative contradiction. Thus, either the postmodernists have Nietzsche wrong or they have Nietzsche right but Nietzsche is wrong. In either case postmodernism is wrong. (It should be noted in passing that it is unclear whether Berkowitz actually believes that Nietzsche himself is a postmodernist. At times he argues that Nietzsche recognized the contradictions of such a constructivist position and that his works are in fact an attempt to show that such a position is untenable, but at other times, he suggests that Nietzsche actually shared such a view.)

The Platonic premise of Berkowitz's argument is that there can be no genuine knowledge of sheer becoming. Berkowitz is thus convinced that there is no poetic knowledge or right making except on the basis of right knowing. The attempt to live as if all thinking were a mere construction or making is impossible. It would require not merely absolute freedom but also absolute power. Indeed, one could only live in such a way if one's making or willing were the source of all becoming. This seemingly impossible task, Berkowitz argues, has increasingly become central to the modern project as a result of the emphasis on will and freedom in modern thought. If freedom is our goal then no constraint is tolerable. Modern thought is thus driven by a kind of inner dialectic from a notion of political liberty to the notion of autonomy in Kant, and thence to the notion of creativity in the thought of Nietzsche and postmodernism.

Part and parcel of this process is the elimination of God, since our freedom, autonomy, and creativity are ultimately constrained by the existence of God. The elimination of God, however, confronts us with another problem, for his death undercuts the ground on which we stand. In order to ground ourselves in a world without God, Berkowitz concludes (following Heidegger), we must strive to become gods. Humans, however, cannot become gods and the attempt to do so necessarily fails. Moreover, the very attempt to achieve such a goal undermines all virtue, love, friendship, and political community.

Berkowitz suggests that in Nietzsche, a postmodern argument that emphasizes becoming and making is conjoined with a premodern argument that draws upon traditional concepts and values. Indeed, the persuasive force of Nietzsche's argument, in Berkowitz's view, derives not from the abstract and morally empty demand that one become a god, but from Nietzsche's appeal to substantive ethical standards that

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he adopts from the ancients. His postmodern immoralism is thus bound up with and underpinned by his ancient moralism. As Berkowitz sees it, we are attracted to Nietzsche's various figures because of their justice or courage or intellectual honesty, and not because of their drive for power and domination; that is, it is their goodness, not their greatness, that appeals to us.

One question about Berkowitz's approach immediately presents itself: might not Nietzsche employ such traditional terminology only for rhetorical purposes, i.e., only in order to persuade his readers of something that would enhance his own power? Nietzsche clearly does employ the terminology of moral discourse and the reader is apt to assume that he uses this terminology in traditional ways, but this may not be the case. Nietzsche may simply be playing upon the reader's belief in truth or justice, or beauty to convince him or her of something without believing himself in truth, justice, or beauty. Language under such circumstances would be merely a tool of manipulation, an instrument of power. Nietzsche might not believe everything, or indeed anything, he says. While I do not believe that this reading of Nietzsche is finally convincing, a philosophical argument must be made against it, and this Berkowitz does not do. To be fair, he does lay out its bare bones, asserting that Nietzsche cannot in fact know or assert anything without accepting something as true and unchanging, and that he cannot act without some notion of the good. On this basis, Berkowitz concludes that Nietzsche cannot simply be the perspectivist that postmodernism wants him to be. Nietzsche, for Berkowitz, cannot and, finally, does not deny that the truth is one and universal—he only asserts that there is no need for the superior individual to insist that everyone recognize this fact (242). Berkowitz's Nietzsche is a contradictory thinker who attempts to achieve the impossible goal of uniting a modern philosophy of will and creativity with an ancient philosophy of reason and virtue. There is a certain nobility in this effort but it ends tragically. As Berkowitz puts it, Nietzsche pushes the antagonism of making and knowing to the breaking point but is unable to overcome it, and instead shatters himself in the attempt (269).

Berkowitz presents his argument in three stages. He first examines Nietzsche's concept of the genuine historian, then his vision of the creative spirit or artist, and finally his idea of the free spirit or philosopher. Berkowitz's discussion of the concept of the genuine historian, which Nietzsche develops in *The Uses and Disadvantages of*

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History for Life, and his treatment of the way this concept shapes and guides Nietzsche's own activity in *The Birth of Tragedy*, *The Genealogy of Morals*, and *The Antichrist* is one of the important contributions of the book. Berkowitz shows that the genuine historian, in Nietzsche's view, does not aim at historical accuracy but at a poetic display of the truths of human nature and excellence that are often lost in historical actuality. Nietzsche, for Berkowitz, is thus in the first instance always a moral philosopher and his concerns with art and history (or genealogy) are always subordinate to his concerns with morality, politics, and philosophy (66, 75). His goal is to determine the right ordering of the soul based upon a vision of the human good as health, strength, and nobility (36). He thus operates with at least an implicit notion of the good (97). The question, in Berkowitz's view, is not whether Nietzsche employs a notion of the human good, but the character of the good that he does employ (104). Berkowitz begins to answer this question through a thoughtful analysis of Nietzsche's generally positive account of Jesus in the *Antichrist*, but he suggests that its final solution can only be determined through an examination of the supreme human type, the artist-creator: Nietzsche's Zarathustra.

In what will undoubtedly be the most controversial section of this book, Berkowitz presents a reading of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that is as remarkable in its originality as it is irritating in its treatment of details. According to Berkowitz, this work is a real test of Nietzsche's philosophy, a dramatic attempt to see whether it is possible to live in accordance with the doctrines of Nietzsche's philosophy of creativity at the very highest level. Berkowitz's answer is that it is not and that Zarathustra is a failure. To my knowledge, there has never been an interpretation of this work that is less sympathetic to the figure of Zarathustra. Zarathustra, according to Berkowitz, is "a vivid image of the disintegration of judgment, the loss of dignity, the estrangement from human ties, the sacrifice of intellectual integrity, and the victimization by an insatiable pride that result—regardless of the fundamental nobility of the original impulse—when the will is assigned the ruling position in the soul" (1995, 129–130). Berkowitz's critique of Zarathustra, however, is not wholly a critique of Nietzsche, since Berkowitz at least half believes that Nietzsche's intention is to show the impossibility of such a life.

Zarathustra begins with what Berkowitz characterizes as Zarathustra's envy of the sun (133) and his consequent decision to become a revered teacher. His failure to convince the many to listen to him,

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however, provokes a wounded contempt that leads him to dismiss them as "last men" and attempt to live first as an outlaw (145) and then as a god (157). This way of life leads to "a denigration of political life, a consuming contempt for ordinary human beings, and a utopian individualism" (174). Zarathustra, according to Berkowitz, wants total mastery and unconditioned creativity (148). Such a goal, however, is beyond human power. The human will is ineluctably conditioned by the past. Zarathustra thus can never attain the freedom and power he desires. He is enraged by this failure and is able to tolerate it only by accepting the lie of the eternal recurrence, which produces not the absolute freedom and mastery he longs for but a compromise with necessity (177). Zarathustra exchanges the pursuit of freedom and wisdom that was his defining characteristic for the illusion of eternity (207). Zarathustra's ordeal, according to Berkowitz, thus demonstrates that self-deification requires a staggering self-delusion and a base lie (209). In this way, the work clarifies the insuperable obstacles to becoming a god (160).

While Nietzsche's own comments in his letters, *Nachlass*, and published works give us little indication that Zarathustra was anything less than his ideal, Berkowitz is able to adduce as evidence for his surprising interpretation Nietzsche's abandonment, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, of the godlike perspective of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (229). According to Berkowitz, in the later works Nietzsche approaches the history of philosophy as a genuine historian in order to show that philosophy is a prejudice (232). Such a demonstration, however, does not show that there is no knowledge, because it is itself genuine knowledge (236). Calling into question the value of truth thus does not mean calling truth itself into question. The decisive issue is how much truth one can bear. The free spirit is characterized by his intellectual honesty (250).

Like *Zarathustra*, however, *Beyond Good and Evil* is an unsuccessful attempt to bring together ancient and modern alternatives, in this case "the Romantic celebration of the heroic individual with the Platonic exaltation of the philosopher[,] by making philosophy the highest form of heroic individualism" (231). By raising the question of the noble, Nietzsche takes the side of traditional philosophy (252), but the concomitant desire for liberation pushes him in a postmodern direction that alienates him from the political realm. While the free spirit does not seek to make himself a god by eternalizing necessity, he still stands so far above politics that the difference between freedom and

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slavery cannot be seen (257–59). For the Nietzsche of *Beyond Good and Evil* the good life is the life dedicated to liberating the will from the myriad ways in which it is enslaved and imprisoned. Human excellence so understood depends upon knowing and mastering the necessity that conditions the will and is thus fundamentally at odds with the life of truth and virtue that depends upon the discovery and acceptance of the truth (266).

Nietzsche's thought is, for Berkowitz, the culmination of the modern view of man as a willful being, and the inherent defects of the modern notion of will corrupt Nietzsche's otherwise classical vision of the human good. Right making follows right knowing for Nietzsche, but in a world without God or some unchanging truth there can be no final knowledge of the good. Hence, right knowing becomes merely a willing of one's own divinity, a rejection of all constraints.

Nietzsche's Dionysian Religiosity

Berkowitz's Nietzsche thus fits into the premodernist schema of the history and defects of modernity as the continuing radicalization of the notion of freedom and will.

There are reasons to doubt, however, that Nietzsche fits into this schema in exactly the way Berkowitz believes. In fact, Berkowitz seems to go astray because, in a peculiar way, he is too influenced by the postmodernist reading of Nietzsche. In particular, Berkowitz accepts Heidegger's fundamental contention that the death of God means the rise to dominance of the human subject. This view lies behind Berkowitz's assertion that for Nietzsche, the most powerful must strive to become gods. Berkowitz not only agrees with Heidegger and the postmodernists about the centrality of subjectivity, he also agrees with postmodernists (who here differ with Heidegger) that Nietzsche's conception of the subject is self-contradictory. He breaks with postmodernism only when it comes to the question of the source and meaning of this contradiction.

There are good reasons, however, to part company with Heidegger and postmodernism much earlier, and Berkowitz's reading of Nietzsche would have been more convincing if he had done so. In particular, it is by no means clear that Nietzsche wants to dispense with the gods and establish the human subject as the ground of all

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existence. Indeed, it is a mistake to believe that for Nietzsche, the death of God means the deification of man. In "the refutation of God," Nietzsche asserts, "only the moral God is refuted" (Nietzsche 1967, VII 3, 354). Only Christians believe otherwise, and this belief leads to nihilism. In reality, the death of the Christian God opens up the possibility of the appearance of other gods. Many interpreters, especially among the postmodernists, have treated this claim as rhetorical, but Nietzsche himself took it quite seriously. In fact, at the end of his creative life, in 1888, he characterized himself as the disciple of Dionysus (ibid., VI 2, 248; VI 3, 154, 310) wrapped up in the fundamental spiritual struggle of his age between Dionysus and the Crucified (ibid., VI 2, 247–49; VI 3, 154, 372). Christianity, in Nietzsche's view, fatally weakens man's god-forming powers (ibid., VIII 3, 321). Only with the death of the Christian God can new gods be brought forth. The death of God thus does not impel humans to become gods, as Berkowitz suggests, but propels them toward new gods.

The failure to take this aspect of Nietzsche's thought seriously leads Berkowitz to misread *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as an account of a failed attempt at self-deification. Zarathustra does not aim so high. In fact, he sees himself as a transitional figure who perhaps lights the way to the promised land, but who cannot enter it.[4] Berkowitz denies this possibility but does not really present an argument to support his position or deal with conflicting evidence (194). Zarathustra does not seek self-deification or even self-glorification but self-overcoming, a term largely missing in Berkowitz's account. It is self-overcoming that produces the overmen, or what Nietzsche later calls his "children," who will in turn reveal a new god. Zarathustra longs not for godhood but for "the golden wonder, the voluntary bark and its master . . . the vintager who is waiting with his diamond knife—your great deliverer, O my soul, the nameless one for whom only future songs will find names" (Nietzsche 1967, VI 1, 276).[5] This vintager, as Lawrence Lampert (1986, 232–33) and others have shown, is Dionysus. The poet "makes" this god by naming him. Such a naming, however, is not a creation out of nothing, not an exercise of absolute power, but a naming of what is finally unfathomable, the creation of a "dream bridge" between things that remain eternally apart; indeed *the* dream bridge that constitutes the connection of all things, the togetherness of all things (Nietzsche 1967, VI 1, 268; VII 3, 51; see also Gillespie 1995, 218–22).

Nietzsche does not want to place man at the center of existence.

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The world in which we find ourselves, in Nietzsche's view, cannot be understood, at least by beings such as we are. We are only moments of a vast and overpowering force, which itself cannot be adequately named or described. Nietzsche sometimes calls this force the will to power. In his *Nachlass*, he often characterizes it as primordial chaos, or an abyss. This description is a reformulation of his original claim, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, that the world is, at its heart, a "contradictory primordial one." It is not something that we can ever "know" in the sense that we know empirical or logical truths. We are part of it and therefore have some experience of it, but we cannot stand outside it or comprehend it as a whole. Indeed, in Nietzsche's view our experience of it is abysmal. We thus can view it only indirectly, through a glass darkly and not face to face.

We can have some insight into the heart of the world not because we make it or because we view it directly but because it opens itself to us. Nietzsche imagines something like an absolute subject who is the author of the world and who can reveal it to us (e.g., Nietzsche 1967, III 1,43). We ourselves, however, have no immediate vision of this whole. What we know of it we know only through the creations of the poet/composer/philosopher/saint who is united with and inspired by a god who produces the actual picture that we are and that we see (Nietzsche 1967, III 1,40; VIII 1,117). The poet speaks not as a man but in prophetic fashion, as the voice of the god. In this sense there is a deification of man but it is not a self-deification. What we know of the whole we know by inspiration, i.e., only through our participation in or unification with this divine subjectivity. Here Nietzsche has more in common with the pantheistic Fichte or the Romantics than with atheistic, postmodernist constructivists.

Nietzsche is deeply aware of human finitude and does not believe that it can be overcome. We cannot know apodictically, but we also do not simply construct the truth. Here postmodernism goes wildly astray in its reading of Nietzsche, as Berkowitz makes apparent. We see the abyss at the heart of existence but only through the veil of concepts or images that transmit it to us and also screen us from it, thus making it bearable (Sallis 1991, 58, 70, 71). The public form of this vision is religion. A religion is a shared view into the heart of the world, a perspective into the truth, but a perspective that is always also a veil. It is, moreover, not *just* a view or a perspective; it is a perspective that faces up to the fundamental mystery of the world more or less well. Thus, there is a rank order of religions. Christianity, in

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Nietzsche's view, is the religion least able to deal with the terrifying ambiguity of existence, the most in need of simplification and order; it is the religion of the weakest human beings. It is followed by Buddhism, Islam, Roman religion, and finally Greek religion in ascending order.[6] These religions are measured in terms of their capacity to confront and live with the fundamental questions at the heart of existence. Religion is thus an inescapable part of human life. Nietzsche's goal is not to do away with it, but to promote the religion that most fully comes to terms with the abyss, the one whose veil is the most transparent. Such a religion, however, is only suitable to the strong, because they alone will be able to bear the great terrifying view that it reveals. It will destroy the weak.

Berkowitz recognizes that there is a rank order of religions, but he suggests that any such order must be guided by an idea of the truth or a conception of the good. Nietzsche's ranking of religions, however, is not guided by a vision of the truth as it is typically understood, because he holds that there is no final knowledge of the truth, there is only a fundamental mystery at the heart of things. While there is some sense in which Nietzsche believes it is "good" to peer into the abyss, he is circumspect about this. It is good for some, i.e., the strong, but not for all and particularly not for the weak. Moreover, it is not even unambiguously good for the strong. They are drawn to this mystery like moths to the flame and have to learn not to fly too close or to peer too perspicaciously into the abyss. Nietzsche thus concludes that even the strongest needs to learn to "stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words, in the whole Olympus of appearance"(Nietzsche 1967, VI 3,437). Contrary to both Berkowitz and postmodernism, Nietzsche thus does not want to reveal the abyss—that way, in his view, leads to madness—but to present it to us as a great and insoluble mystery or question.

The name he gives to this mystery at the heart of existence, in both his early and late thought, is Dionysus (1967, VI 2,247). However, as he himself indicates in his *Nachlass*, Dionysus is only another name for the eternal recurrence (1967, VII 2,1; VIII 3,347, 397). The eternal recurrence is thus not a base lie, as Berkowitz would have us believe, but the "truest" possible representation of the whole, the greatest possible acceptance of the fundamental chaos and mystery of existence, "the closest approximation of becoming to being," as Nietzsche puts it (1967, VIII 1,320). Zarathustra's acceptance of this

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doctrine is thus not a mark of abject failure but the highest possible affirmation of life.

* * *

While there is much to admire in Berkowitz's book, and while it presents an important argument against the postmodernist reading of Nietzsche, it is too deeply influenced by the claim that Nietzsche's thought deifies the individual subject. Berkowitz consequently underestimates the continuing importance of religion in Nietzsche's thought. That said, I do not think that we should be any more comfortable with the more theological Nietzsche that I have been pointing toward than the failed Prometheus Berkowitz portrays. The attribution of an absolute (and transrational) will to the cosmos may produce an ethics and politics that is even more rash and destructive than the atheistic or immoralistic ethics Berkowitz attributes to Nietzsche. In fact, I believe that in his effort to demonstrate the untenability of Nietzsche's thought, Berkowitz underestimates its millenarian consequences.

Berkowitz's more general claim, that there is a struggle between reason and will in Nietzsche's thought, is certainly correct. It could be strengthened, however, by a more philosophic defense of the impossibility of a purely instrumental or rhetorical use of language. Here one needs to confront the Derridean claims more directly.

What of Berkowitz's larger defense of classical rationality against both modern reason and the unreason of postmodernism? He successfully demonstrates the essential incoherence of the thought of the seminal thinker of postmodernism, Friedrich Nietzsche. But there are several problems with Berkowitz's assumption that ancient reason offers a real alternative to modernity. To begin with, it is by no means clear that there is a unified ancient or traditional view of reason. There are important and perhaps insuperable differences between such diverse thinkers as Heraclitus, Protagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, and Chrysippus, to name only a few. Moreover, even if one looks to the realm of practice, it is doubtful that there is a general agreement about what Berkowitz calls "rationally intelligible ends"(4). Ancient skepticism was as skeptical about practical as about theoretical matters. Finally, even if we confine our attention to Plato, who plays such a decisive role in the argument between the postmodernists and the premodernists, we cannot fail to notice how many of his dialogues end in aporia, and how difficult he finds the task of producing

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a consistent theory of rationally intelligible ends. It is perhaps no accident that the later Academy became the center not of rationalism but of skepticism. Like Heidegger and Nietzsche, Berkowitz overstates the unity of ancient or traditional notions of reason.

I do not raise these questions because I believe that the premodernist position is untenable, but only to point out that the crisis of modern reason cannot be resolved simply by pointing to the ancients or traditional reason. Berkowitz himself seems, in the end, to recognize this fact; in the conclusion of his book he evokes the image of yet another Nietzsche, a Nietzsche more in the image of Montaigne, a skeptical Nietzsche whose questioning is more radical than either the dogmatism of postmodernism or the insistent rationalism of premodernism. Berkowitz still hopes that this Nietzsche will lead us back to what he eloquently characterizes as venerable and forgotten lands, but he shows a real appreciation for the intellectual daring of Nietzsche's confrontation with the deepest questions.

Whether Berkowitz achieves a final victory against the postmodern Nietzsche seems doubtful, but he certainly lands many telling blows. That he is able, in the end, to point us toward a better and ultimately undogmatic Nietzsche is a reminder that amidst the intellectual wars of our time honesty is still a virtue.

NOTES

1. Such intellectual movements as utilitarianism, positivism, analytic philosophy, and neo-Kantianism, for example, have developed distinctively modern, Enlightenment strategies for dealing with the crisis of reason that Kant points to in the antinomies. Critical theory in its many forms has followed a quasi-Hegelian path that abandons the Enlightenment notion of rationality and puts in its place a dialectical notion of reason.
2. While this view of Nietzsche is particularly appealing to postmodernists because it coincides so neatly with their own agenda, it would be a mistake to assume that they have simply read this agenda back into Nietzsche. A similar view of Nietzsche was already developed by Karl Jaspers in his *Nietzsche: Einführung in das Verständnis seines Philosophierens* (1936), and by Wolfgang Müller-Lauter in his *Nietzsche: Seine Philosophie der Gegensätze und die Gegensätze seiner Philosophie* (1971) although neither author was a postmodernist.
3. A demonstration of this point would depend upon coming to terms with the apparent contradiction between this claim and Plato's own poetic practice.
4. In sketches for the continuation of the Zarathustra project, Zarathustra pro-

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claims his doctrine of the eternal recurrence in the midst of a city in flames and dies with the appearance of his children. This corresponds to Nietzsche's later assumption that the period from 1888 to 2088 would be characterized by war and destruction, ending only with the establishment of a thousand-year Dionysian empire (Kuhn 1992, 237).

5. Nietzsche almost certainly has in mind here one or several of the many famous vase paintings of the coming of Dionysus.
6. He also discusses the Law of Manu, but where to insert this in the sequence is unclear. It should certainly come between Buddhism and Greek religion, but exactly where?

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Greg Hill

SOLIDARITY, OBJECTIVITY, AND THE HUMAN FORM OF LIFE: WITTGENSTEIN VS. RORTY

ABSTRACT: *Reason, objectivity, and human nature are now suspect ideas. Among postmodern thinkers, Richard Rorty has advanced an especially forceful critique of these notions. Drawing partly on Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, Rorty contends that objectivity is no more than a metaphysical name for intersubjective agreement, and that "human nature" is an empty category, there being nothing beneath history and culture. Wittgenstein himself, however, recognized within the world's many civilizations "the common behavior of mankind," without which Rorty's ethnocentric "solidarity" would be inconceivable. This common form of life—the life of those who speak—encompasses countless human activities that presuppose and are interwoven with the concepts of reason and objectivity.*

What difference would it make in the lives of human beings if our minds could have contact with reality? This question, which gave Greek philosophy its orientation and purpose, now seems childlike to many. It lacks the self-consciousness demanded by an age that has come to doubt whether "human nature," "mind," and "reality" are still useful categories. The philosophical preoccupations of classical antiquity are not, of course, the primary targets of contemporary skepti-

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cism, which is directed instead at the surviving ideals of the Enlightenment, with its commitment to reason, to human rights, and to the idea of Man. In place of the ancient pursuit of truth and goodness, and of the modern commitment to rationality and its embodiment in universal principles of right, we are urged by our postmodern contemporaries to seek meaning in the particular texts, regions of discourse, and communities that furnish the conceptual vocabulary within which, and *only* within which, we might hope to justify our beliefs and actions.

This understanding of the postmodern condition is forcefully presented in Richard Rorty's essay, "Solidarity or Objectivity?" (1991).[1] Rorty contends that we must choose between two mutually exclusive ways of giving sense to our lives. On the one hand, we may allow ourselves to be guided by the goal of understanding the way things really are as we try to comprehend a world that we take to be independent of our beliefs. The ideal of "objectivity" governs this pursuit, and those who have chosen it will necessarily insist upon the distinction between knowledge and opinion, between mere belief and true belief. On the other hand, we may reject the possibility of a "transcultural rationality," which requires a vantage point outside the particular community to which we belong, and affirm instead the quest for agreement, or "solidarity," within it. The aim of this quest will not be a true understanding of an independent reality, but rather a broadening and deepening of our collective identity as bearers of the cultural inheritance of the West.[2]

Rorty is not an impartial observer of this debate, but a partisan of the solidarity camp. He rejects the premises upon which the claim of objectivity rests: a conception of reality as something independent of our language and beliefs, truth as the correspondence between our beliefs and the way things really are, and human nature as an "inner structure" that leads us to converge upon a common set of judgments. With no language-independent facts to constrain belief, and no transcendental categories of understanding to give a common form to human thought, we have no grounds on the basis of which to advance claims of reason, and so must address our arguments to those who share enough of our beliefs "to make fruitful conversation possible" (Rorty 1991, 30).[3] In short, Rorty urges us to accept the ethnocentric limits of our thinking and to abandon the commitment to objectivity in favor of achieving "intersubjective agreement" among "members of our own tribe."

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Given Rorty's interest in deflating metaphysical conceptions of reason, truth, and reality, it is not surprising that he turns to Wittgenstein (among others) for support in building his case against objectivity, for Wittgenstein is often read as a philosopher who derided the claims of metaphysics, turning instead to language, convention, and "forms of life" as the only matrices within which meaning and coherence are possible. On Rorty's understanding, "to be thoroughly Wittgensteinian" is to "accept the argument that since truth is a property of sentences, since sentences are dependent for their existence upon vocabularies, and since vocabularies are made by human beings, so are truths" (1989, 21). In this passage and elsewhere, Rorty advances an interpretation of Wittgenstein that is intended to bolster Rorty's argument that reality only bears on our thoughts as cause to effect, that reasons go no deeper than communal agreement, and that "truth" is but a "compliment" we pay to an idea (1991, 24).

Although there are Wittgensteinian resonances in some of what Rorty has to say, I do not believe Wittgenstein would have been a willing volunteer in Rorty's unconditional war against objectivity. Nor is it clear that Wittgenstein could be relied upon as a steadfast ally of Rorty's "ironic solidarity." My aim in this essay is to advance a different view of Wittgenstein's thought and its implications for "objectivity" and "solidarity," a view that sets Wittgenstein's philosophy in opposition to the main thrust of Rorty's postmodern manifesto. In reclaiming Wittgenstein from Rorty's "post-metaphysical culture," I begin by outlining a Wittgensteinian account of "solidarity" that is, at the same time, a defense of human nature as an indispensable concept for many theoretical and interpretative purposes. Next I reconstruct a conception of "objectivity" from a Wittgensteinian point of view, an effort that is intended to double as a critique of Rorty's assault on reason and truth. Finally, I offer a few summary remarks about what is essential, and what is contingent, in human experience.

I. SOLIDARITY

In developing the contrast between objectivity and solidarity, Rorty (1991, 151–61) draws on a parallel contrast between "representationalist" and "social-practice" philosophies of language. The representationalist school, which includes Frege, Russell, Tarski, and the early Wittgenstein, construes language as a medium for depicting the way the world really is and regards truth as the basic concept in a theory

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of meaning. According to this view, the meaning of a proposition is equivalent to what must be the case in the world for the proposition to be true. It is the task of philosophy to set forth the logical requirements that must be satisfied if our beliefs, and the propositions that express them, are to give an accurate representation of reality.[4]

The "social-practice philosophy of language" comprises both a critique of the representationalist theory and an alternative to it. The point of departure for this view, which is developed in the later work of Wittgenstein, is an acceptance of our actual linguistic practices as being in order just as they are.[5] In contrast to the representationalist school, Wittgenstein stressed that language is used for a great many purposes besides description. We command, cajole, and comfort, in addition to identifying, depicting, and representing. Moreover, it is only by virtue of a word's *use* within these activities, or "language-games," that it has a meaning and, hence, can be employed (along with other words) to describe a state of affairs (or express feelings, make commitments, give directions, and so forth). In this view, truth does not involve a correspondence between thought and reality, or even between sentences and states of affairs. Rather, "truth" is what can be justifiably asserted *within* a language. Philosophy can help elucidate this notion, but cannot legislate its necessary and sufficient conditions.

For Rorty (1991, 14), the devastating import of the social-practice philosophy of language for the ideal of "objectivity" is found in its critical implications for "the notion of 'language-independent determinate reality.'" The world does not present itself to us in ready-made pieces, but is divided up by language in ways that depend on our purposes. There is the physicist's world of subatomic particles and the ordinary world of tables and chairs. Because different "vocabularies" are used for different purposes, it is pointless to ask which is more "real" than the other. To claim that a particular vocabulary or scheme of concepts is superior only means that it is more "useful for coping with the environment" (ibid., 5). It cannot be shown that one scheme provides a closer representation of reality because we cannot break out of "our language and our beliefs and [test] them against something known without their aid" (ibid., 6).[6]

In Rorty's hands, the social-practice philosophy of language is forged into a weapon with which to bludgeon "universalistic notions like 'the nature of the self' or 'our essential humanity,'" which, despite their transcendental pretensions, are the product of historical, and

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therefore contingent, vocabularies (Rorty 1991, 14). Rorty (1989, xiii) embraces a thoroughgoing historicism, insisting that "socialization, and thus historical circumstance, goes all the way down—that there is nothing 'beneath' socialization or prior to history which is definatory of the human." In short, there are no natural categories, no "'natural' cut in the spectrum of similarities and differences . . . which marks the end of the rational beings and the beginning of the nonrational ones" (ibid., 192).

In dismissing both the notion of human nature and the conception of reality as something independent of the words used to describe it, Rorty removes the essential premises sustaining the claim of objectivity. All that remains following this deconstruction of humanity and world, reason and reality, the subject and object of belief, is belief itself—the lineament and sinew of solidarity. According to Rorty, neither the world nor our nature constrains belief; the only thing that can counter a belief is another belief (1982, 160–75; 1991, 126–61). No legitimate argument may appeal to the essences of things, nor can any claim be compelling that presupposes the notion of a "trans-historical" or "trans-cultural reason." In fact, there can be no appeal to anything "save the way *we* live now, what *we* do now, how *we* talk now—anything beyond *our* own little moment of world-history" (Rorty 1991, 158, original emphasis).

Before outlining some Wittgensteinian reservations about the reasoning that leads Rorty to this conclusion, I need to say something more about Rorty's characterization of language. To begin with, Rorty (1991, 15) urges us not to think of language as "a medium between self and reality but simply as a flag which signals the desirability of using a certain vocabulary when trying to cope with certain kinds of organisms." To say that a particular organism "is a language user is just to say that pairing off the marks and noises it makes with those we make will prove a useful tactic in predicting and controlling its future behavior" (Rorty 1989, 15). Rorty claims that "this Wittgensteinian attitude . . . naturalizes mind and language by making all questions about the relation of either to the rest of the universe *causal* questions, as opposed to questions about adequacy of representation or expression" (ibid., 15, original emphasis). Thus, while the world does not supply us with reasons for holding beliefs (because "the world does not speak"), once we have "programmed ourselves with a language, the world can cause us to hold beliefs" (ibid., 16). Rorty does not explain how this linguistic programming is ac-

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complished, but if we take seriously his point about language having only a causal relation to the world, then language learning, like the formation of belief, must also be the product of cause and effect. Once we have successfully programmed ourselves with a language, Rorty insists that there is no extralinguistic vantage point from which to assess and modify our linguistic software. We have no "skyhook" with which to free ourselves "from the contingency of having been acculturated as we were" (1991, 13). Instead, we inherit a vocabulary that opens certain possibilities for us and forecloses others, a circumstance Rorty sums up with Heidegger's aphorism: "Language speaks man" (ibid., 13).

If we take this affirmation of Heidegger's maxim as a convenient shorthand for much of the reasoning that leads Rorty to embrace solidarity, then the upshot of the interpretation of Wittgenstein I wish to advance can be summarized by turning the maxim on its head. It is human beings who speak. My aim in the rest of this section is to bring out the importance of human nature in Wittgenstein's understanding of language and, thereby, to reconstruct the subject who speaks (as well as believes, knows, and theorizes).

We can begin to bring out the differences between Rorty and Wittgenstein by comparing their divergent accounts of the process of "acculturation." For Wittgenstein, learning a language is a complicated business because language belongs to, and is constitutive of, countless activities and practices. To learn the meaning of a word is at the same time to learn about, and to learn to take part in, these activities and practices. To understand the meaning of "obey," for example, a person must develop an understanding of the practice of command and obedience, become familiar with what sorts of people may issue commands in which sorts of circumstances, recognize what constitutes "an order," "obeying an order," and so on. Because the practice of command and obedience overlaps with other practices, an understanding of "obedience" also requires a corresponding understanding of "authority," "rights," and "disobedience," to mention just a few closely related concepts.

I do not think Rorty would disagree with this brief characterization of what is involved in learning a language, because it is central to the "social-practice philosophy" he endorses. The trouble is rather that Rorty does not appreciate the nature of the task involved in learning how to speak when the meaning of words is intertwined with activities that often have no precise boundary, with practices and

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conventions that criss-cross and overlap in different ways, and with human intentions that shade off into one another with the slightest change in tone or facial expression. To characterize this learning process as "programming ourselves with a language," which suggests the straightforward application of well-defined rules, is to miss the complex judgment involved in calling a particular piece of behavior an "act of obedience." I am going to say more about this shortly, but the point I am leading up to is that *our nature* plays an important role in making this kind of judgment possible, a role that Rorty overlooks because he thinks such judgments are *caused* by the world as it impinges upon our linguistic programs.

The difficulty involved in learning to communicate can be illustrated with the help of two of Wittgenstein's most famous ideas—the notion of "family resemblances" and of what it is "to follow a rule." Wittgenstein introduces the idea of family resemblances in the course of showing that many words have no essence or common element that lies beneath their diverse uses. If we actually "*look and see*" whether there is anything common to the things we call "games," Wittgenstein insists we "will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that" (1958a, para. 66, original emphasis). Wittgenstein contends that this is also true of many other words, including "sentences," "languages," "reading," and even of the use of the word *good* (ibid., paras. 77, 108, 164, and 197). Instead of a common feature, or general form, of a thing or activity, "we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail" (ibid., para. 66). Wittgenstein calls these criss-crossing similarities "family resemblances" and offers the analogy of a rope in which no single fiber runs throughout the entire length, but rather in which there is an "overlapping of many fibers" (ibid., para. 67). Although Wittgenstein stresses that this lack of a common denominator does not prevent us from understanding one another when we speak of "games," "sentences," and such, the point I wish to stress is how remarkable it is that we *are* able to communicate with words that have no common element among their diverse uses, no necessary and sufficient conditions governing their employment in varied circumstances. The difficulty, to return to Rorty's metaphor, is that while it is easy to program a computer to select from a list of words all those with, say, two vowels, it would be immensely more difficult, perhaps even impossible, to program a computer to select

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from, say, contemporary English literature all the things we call "games," or "sentences," or "acts of obedience," just because there is nothing common to *all* "games," nor to *all* "sentences," nor to *all* "acts of obedience."

A similar problem arises in connection with following a rule. In this case, the difficulty is not the lack of a common denominator, but the fact that rules do not interpret themselves. Thus Wittgenstein asks, "how can a rule show me what I have to do at *this* point? Whatever I do is, on some interpretation, in accord with the rule" (1958a, para. 198, original emphasis). The open-ended relationship between rules and their application can be illustrated by noting that the rule of equity, which tells us to "treat like cases alike," leaves open the question of what is to count as a relevant difference between cases. An interpretation of the rule may help, but it, too, requires application. In short, there is a gap between a rule understood as a formal algorithm and the application of the rule to particular cases. Moreover, this gap cannot be bridged by a further rule or interpretation because these, too, still "hang in the air," waiting to be applied (ibid., para. 198; see Wittgenstein 1967, para. 440). Although Wittgenstein emphasizes that we *are* able to act in accordance with rules despite their open-ended character, the point I wish to stress is how amazing this is in light of the diversity of circumstances in which many rules are learned (often by means of examples alone) and applied.

The gap between rules and their application, and the lack of common denominators among the diverse uses of words, provide the necessary context for understanding Wittgenstein's remark that "if language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments" (1958a, para. 242). The importance of this "agreement in judgments" can be illustrated by example. Suppose there are two speakers who give the same definition of the word *obedience*, both saying, "it means doing what is ordered." Suppose, however, that these speakers do not apply the definition in the same way. One speaker uses the word only when someone responds to a command in a deferential manner, whereas the other uses the word without this qualification. These two speakers do not share a common understanding of "obedience," for despite the fact that they give the same formal definition, they evidently use the word in different ways. If they are to avoid misunderstanding, they must *agree in their judgments*, that is, they must regard the same kinds of behavior as instances of "obedience."

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The points I have been anxious to make are, first, that the fuzzy nature of family resemblances and the open-ended aspect of following a rule seem to pose difficult obstacles to communication and understanding, and, second, that these obstacles are surmounted insofar as there is "agreement in judgments." What I now want to draw attention to is the depth and omnipresence of this "agreement in judgments." Although misunderstandings sometimes occur, as in the example of the speakers with different conceptions of "obedience," such disagreements among the speakers of a language are relatively uncommon. For the most part, people agree about what constitutes "obeying an order," the logical inference to be drawn in a particular case, the darker of two colors, and so forth.[7] To appreciate what a remarkable achievement this agreement is, we need only bring to mind the variety of behavior that is called "careless," or "refined," or "thoughtful," or the way in which a word's meaning can change depending on the speed, inflection, or urgency with which it is spoken. Despite this multitude of possibilities, there is normally agreement in judgments even when the character of behavior in question turns on something as subtle as a slight change in facial expression (in faces that, themselves, exhibit endless variety!). This kind of "agreement" is not akin to a contract or a deliberate attempt to reach a mutual understanding. Nor is it like an agreement on a specific occasion or agreement from time to time. Rather, in the words of one of Wittgenstein's commentators, it is "being in agreement throughout, being in harmony," as when we agree, as a matter of course, in continuing the series, 2, 4, 6, 8, by naturally writing 10, 12, 14, 16 (Cavell 1979, 32).

Of course we do not always agree in what we regard as "obedience," "disobedience," etc. There are ambiguous cases, unusual contexts, contested concepts, and other features of our life and language that give rise to disagreement in the application of criteria. Does carrying out an order with a smirk on one's face count as "obeying the order"? It is not always easy to say. Yet the very possibility of asking the question presupposes that we agree in seeing the look on the person's face *as* a smirk and in hearing the words prior to the act *as* an order being given. It is only because we ordinarily agree in such judgments without thinking that we are able to form beliefs and communicate them to others.

Wittgenstein's notion of "agreement in judgments" should not be mistaken for Rorty's depiction of acculturation as "programming

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ourselves with a language," and "making a judgment" should not be mistaken for being "caused to hold a belief." The training involved in learning a language is misconceived if it is understood in Rorty's terms, according to which we are fitted with linguistic software that blindly converts external inputs into semantic outputs by means of a causal algorithm. Learning a language does not require the installation of a mechanism, but the mastery of a technique and a way of seeing. Speakers must learn to distinguish between correct and incorrect usage, to grasp the meaning of words spoken in different contexts and in different tones of voice, to recognize a particular arrangement of things *as* an instance of something, and so forth. Such training is *possible* because human beings naturally react to many things in the same way, but the *result* of the training is not a conditioned response. Language is a normative practice and learning to use words according to the appropriate criteria—that is, learning to speak—necessarily involves learning to judge. (It is partly because Rorty has a deterministic view of language acquisition, and even of speaking itself, that he banishes "judgment" and "reason" from his post-metaphysical world. This criticism is developed in greater detail in the next section.)[8]

In the course of his discussion of "agreement in judgments," Wittgenstein imagines someone asking, "'So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?'" (1958a, para. 241). Now, while Rorty affirms "intersubjective agreement" as a measure of (or, alternatively, as a replacement for) "truth," Wittgenstein's own response to the question runs as follows: "It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life" (ibid., original emphasis). Whether this answer lends support to Rorty's conception of solidarity obviously depends on what Wittgenstein means by the phrase, "form of life." I am going to try to elucidate the meaning and significance of this phrase in a moment, but first I will briefly outline an interpretation of these words that is favorable to Rorty's notion of solidarity.

Wittgenstein's phrase, *form of life*, has been interpreted by some commentators as a shorthand for culture or way of life, which is a plausible reading given the role played by social conventions, practices, and customs in Wittgenstein's understanding of language (see Winch 1958). It may also be granted that Rorty and Wittgenstein share the view that in any explanation or argument, reasons must eventually come to an end, and that this stopping point is not the

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"structure of the mind," nor a "language-independent determinate reality," but rather is somehow coupled to our life. If we now equate a "form of life" with the shared beliefs that define a particular culture or civilization, and if we also suppose that these beliefs come to be affirmed because they are shared rather than because they are "true," we are then standing at the threshold of Rortian solidarity.[9]

The trouble with this interpretation can be seen by considering its implications in connection with other things Wittgenstein says about "form of life." When he writes that "to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life," it follows on the foregoing interpretation that if we imagine two languages, say English and Tamil, we must then imagine two corresponding forms of life, the life of those who speak English and Tamil, respectively (1958a, para. 19). This result cannot, however, be squared with the following passage from the *Philosophical Investigations*, in which Wittgenstein draws a distinction not between different cultures, but between the human form of life and the rest of the animal kingdom: "One can imagine an animal angry, frightened, unhappy, happy, startled. But hopeful? And why not? . . . Can only those hope who can talk? Only those who have mastered the use of a language. That is to say, the phenomena of hope are modes of this complicated form of life" (ibid., part II, 174). In referring to *this* "complicated form of life," Wittgenstein means the form of life that is possible for those who speak, i.e., human beings. The "phenomena of hope" are possible for us because we can speak *a* language; they do not require that we master English, or Tamil, or any other *particular* language. Moreover, in the context of this passage, "form of life" could only mean the life associated with a particular language and culture if we were prepared to imagine languages and cultures in which people do *not* hope.

Wittgenstein gave no indication that he believed there were human societies in which the "phenomena of hope" were absent. Quite the contrary, he stresses the many *common* features of human life, features that are rarely mentioned because they are so obvious. Thus, Wittgenstein characterizes the human use of language in "commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting" as being "as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing" (1958a, para. 25). In this passage and in others, Wittgenstein composes a portrait of the human form of life, which includes many "natural reactions" common to our species (ibid., para. 185); expressive faces that reveal "joy, indifference, interest, excitement, torpor" (1967, para. 220);

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a distinctive "*rhythm* of work" (ibid., para. 102, original emphasis); the capacity to feel "ardent love or hope," but not just "for the space of one second" (1958a, para. 583); different attitudes to "what is alive" and to "what is dead" (ibid., para. 284).

It may be granted that Wittgenstein devotes more attention to exploring the differences among language-games and the activities into which they are interwoven than he does examining the similarities among them. But the different activities Wittgenstein discusses are not unique to particular cultures; they are the universal activities of differentiating between colors, measuring, counting, hoping, regretting. And when Wittgenstein does wish to bring before us something strange and alien, he does not draw examples from "exotic" cultures, but rather invents fictitious forms of life, such as a society in which speakers use language only to give orders or in which children are brought up to express no feelings of any kind (1958a, para. 19; also 1967, paras. 383 ff.).

Although speech is an essential part of the human form of life, Wittgenstein does not regard it as the only thing that differentiates us from other animals, for he also says that "if a lion could talk we could not understand him" (ibid., part II, 223).[10] Wittgenstein does not explain why this might be so, but we may suppose that human beings could not understand a talking lion because there would be no "agreement in judgments" between the lion and us, no "being in harmony" between the two species. Although Wittgenstein is content to point to the fact that human speakers just *do agree* in our judgments, we may speculate that talking lions would not regard things as we do because they do not share our form of life: they do not walk upright, grow crops, eat with utensils, wear clothes, and the like. Whether we conceive of the agreement in judgments among human beings as being grounded in, or constitutive of, our form of life, the life of a talking lion would be very different from ours, and not "being in agreement throughout," the meaning of the lion's words would be opaque to us.[11]

Interpreted in this way, Wittgenstein's conception of "forms of life" lends no support to Rorty's critique of "human nature," but rather stands in direct opposition to it. Rorty's argument for a self-conscious ethnocentrism, which rises from the rubble left by his deconstruction of "our essential humanity," flies in the face of Wittgenstein's anthropocentrism.[12] Whereas Rorty rejects human nature in favor of cultural and historical differences, Wittgenstein speaks of "the common

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behavior of mankind as the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language" (ibid., para. 206). Whereas Rorty insists that history and socialization "go all the way down," Wittgenstein traces the origin of many universal language-games to "primitive forms of behavior" and "natural reactions" (ibid., para. 185).[13] And whereas Rorty dismisses the notion of "a natural 'cut' in the spectrum of similarities and differences . . . between you and a dog, or you and one of Asimov's robots" (1989, 192), Wittgenstein claims that "only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious" (1958a, para. 281).

Returning to the phrase with which we began, it is fair to say that Rorty's "solidarity" is much closer to what Wittgenstein calls "agreement in opinions" than to what he means by "agreement in form of life." On Wittgenstein's account, shared belief—solidarity—*is only possible* among beings who share an "essential humanity," to use the phrase Rorty mocks. The members of a culture can only be said to share the belief that "cruelty is wrong" insofar as they agree in *what* they regard as "cruelty" and in *how* they generally react to behavior that is "wrong." This "agreement in judgments" belongs to the human form of life just as much as such general facts about our nature as our propensity to cry out in pain when badly hurt, to move forward more easily than we move backward, to have bodies that change slowly over time. Beneath the different creeds of the world's many cultures there lie commonalties of being that make culture itself possible. And while civilizations take varied forms, it is possible to recognize within each one "the common behavior of mankind."

II. OBJECTIVITY

Rorty equates the ideal of "objectivity" with the desire to stand "in immediate relation to a nonhuman reality." "This relation," he continues, "is immediate in the sense that it does not derive from a relation between such a reality" and a person's "tribe," "nation," or "imagined band of comrades" (1991, 21). We already have a pretty good idea of why Rorty rejects this ideal: if the notion of a "language-independent determinate reality" is incoherent, then the possibility of standing in immediate relation to this reality also makes no sense. Drawing upon Donald Davidson's critique of "the dualism of scheme and content," Rorty dismisses any understanding of the relation between mind and

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world that rests upon a "distinction between determinate realities and a set of words or concepts which may or may not be 'adequate' to them" (ibid., 10). Rather than construing beliefs as "quasi-pictures" of the world, which may be true or false, Rorty proposes that we regard them as "adaptations to the environment" (ibid.). On this view, there can be no contact between thought and reality such that features of the world provide reasons for a particular judgment or belief. Instead, Rorty insists that "we understand all there is to know about the relation of beliefs to the world when we understand their causal relations to the world" (ibid., 128).

The philosophical tradition Rorty urges us to cast aside consists mainly of reflections on a three-sided relationship between a thinking subject, a set of received beliefs, and the world in virtue of which beliefs are true or false. In Rorty's revised account, the first element of this relation—the rational subject—is swallowed up by a "socialization" process that goes "all the way down." And the third element—the world—is pushed beyond the reach of thought, where it becomes the cause, rather than the object, of belief. Having thus deconstructed the knower and the known, thereby eliminating the possibility of knowledge, Rorty suggests that we make a virtue of necessity, relinquishing our outmoded commitment to objectivity in favor of a self-conscious ethnocentrism that appeals to neither truth nor reason.

If we now turn to Wittgenstein's thinking about these questions, we face a dilemma: we can either try to deduce from Wittgenstein's general remarks about language the possibilities and limits of objectivity as a certain kind of relation between thought and reality, or we can "look and see" how objectivity and related concepts actually function in our life and language. Rorty pursues the first course, reasoning from (what he takes to be) the Wittgensteinian premise that the world provides no reasons for holding beliefs to (what he takes to be) the Davidsonian conclusion that reality only impinges on belief as cause to effect.[14] I think the premise of this argument is both wrong in itself and wrong as an interpretation of what Wittgenstein says about language. But before we consider Wittgenstein's own words, it will be useful to have before us some examples of the role the concept of objectivity plays in our life and language.

To begin, we may note that the words *objective* and *objectivity* have roughly the same meaning in ordinary language as they have in philosophical argument. Consider a dictionary definition of "objective" (Webster's 1966, 1012):

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1. Having to do with a known or perceived object as distinguished from something only existing in the mind of the subject, or person thinking; hence
2. Being, or regarded as being, independent of the mind; real; actual;
3. Determined by, and emphasizing, the features and characteristics of the object rather than the thoughts and feelings of the speaker, writer, artist, etc.;
4. Without bias or prejudice; detached; impersonal.

Each of these delineations stipulates or implies a distinction between the attributes of an object or state of affairs, on the one hand, and the thoughts, feelings, or opinions of a thinking subject, on the other. We appeal to this distinction, explicitly or implicitly, in a variety of language-games: in calling a peculiar sight an optical illusion, in correcting an error in measurement, in asking someone if she is color blind, in explaining to a child that unicorns are imaginary, in suggesting that someone move a few steps back in order to get a better perspective on a painting, in criticizing someone's judgment as "subjective," and so forth.[15]

Although the word *objective* does not appear in this brief enumeration of language-games and activities, the concept of objectivity is interwoven with each of them. It would make no sense to speak of an optical illusion unless we could conceive of an object as something separate from our perception of it. Similarly, it would be pointless to try to get a better view of something if we had no conception of things having attributes independent of a particular vantage point. Nor could we make a mistake in measurement or estimation, or criticize a judgment as "subjective," without the complementary notion of an object or state of affairs that is independent of the activities of measuring, estimating, and judging. The meaning of the distinction between appearance and reality, between something seeming so and something being so, is exhibited in these ways of speaking and acting.

Although Wittgenstein would not have put it this way, the concept of objectivity is a transcendental requirement, a precondition, of a great many language-games. Beliefs, for example, can only be *about* objects and states of affairs, *about* the height of a building or the fairness of a social arrangement, if these things are independent of the believer. This notion of something independent of the thinking subject is not an external demand imposed by a theory of perception,

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belief, or judgment, but an internal requirement that belongs to our concepts of perception, belief, and judgment (albeit in different ways). Wittgenstein makes a similar point in calling the words "true" and "false" "constituent parts" of language-games involving propositions, and in distinguishing this constitutive role from the external demands of a logical calculus.[16] The use of "true" and "false," he says, "*belongs* to our concept 'proposition' but does not fit it" (1958a, para. 136, original emphasis). Similarly, "objectivity" is part of our understanding of what it *means* to perceive, to describe, or to judge something.

I have been trying to show that the concept of objectivity is a constitutive element of many language-games and practices, some of which, like learning to describe objects or to measure things, are common to all of humankind, "part of our natural history," to invoke Wittgenstein's phrase. But, it may be objected, I have been discussing a very ordinary notion of objectivity, which is a distant cousin of the metaphysical-cum-epistemological conception Rorty criticizes. Granted, Rorty's criticism *is* directed against a philosophical ideal—the possibility of achieving a true representation of reality. Nonetheless, the everyday notion of objectivity, with its implicit distinction between the experience of an object and the object of experience, encompasses much (though not all) of what belongs to its philosophical counterpart. Moreover, Rorty's critique of this ideal, as well as the alternative conception he proposes in its place, are deeply at odds with the Wittgensteinian philosophy of language he claims to embrace.

Wittgenstein himself once held, and later rejected, a view similar to the "mirror of nature" conception Rorty attacks (see Wittgenstein 1961). According to Wittgenstein's early "picture theory of meaning," a proposition is a model, or picture, of how things stand in reality, and the proposition is true if things do stand thus-and-so. Although Wittgenstein ultimately abandoned this theory, he did so for reasons very different from those Rorty brings to bear against "objectivity." For Wittgenstein, the fatal flaw in the picture theory was that it failed to show *how* the picture presented in a proposition is linked to the state of affairs it purports to represent.[17] In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein retraces his earlier steps, repeating his original claim that thought and world "stand in line one behind the other, each equivalent to each," but he now complains that "the language-game in which they are to be applied is missing" (1958a, para. 96). The comparison of a proposition to a state of affairs in the world re-

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quires a language-game or practice to guide the comparison, in much the same way as the "translation" of a written score of music into a musical performance requires a practice or tradition.

Wittgenstein's demonstration that words can only refer to things if they already have a regular use within a language eliminates the possibility of *constructing* any kind of conceptual scheme *on the basis of* something that is given independently of language.[18] Like Rorty, Wittgenstein rejects "the given" as something to which our words can, or must, correspond. But whereas Wittgenstein is content to bring the concepts of "belief" and "reality" back to their uses in our life, Rorty proposes to draw a boundary line around belief such that "reality" lies beyond the line, and the only "border crossings" permitted are one-way incursions in which parts of "reality" cause language users to hold certain beliefs. Inside the perimeter Rorty has drawn around belief, there is no order or network in the form of internal relations among the concepts that comprise a vocabulary—nothing that could justify, for example, the claim that the words *true* and *false* are "interwoven" with the concept of a proposition. In Rorty's post-metaphysical world, belief is unfettered by any rational connection to reality, or by any grammatical requirements from within language itself. Constrained by nothing, belief is no longer *about* anything (cf. Farrell 1996).

Rorty presents us with a choice between two unappealing alternatives: an incoherent appeal to "the given" as a justification of belief, and a deconstructed conception of "belief" that makes no rational contact with the world. There is, however, a third alternative, which we can elicit from some of Wittgenstein's general remarks about language, thought, and reality. To begin with, consider a passage we have already cited: "It is what people *say* that is true and false, and they agree in the language that they use." Here Wittgenstein draws a distinction Rorty fails to register, that is, the distinction between what belongs to language and what belongs to belief.[19] The speakers of a language are able to form and express beliefs, which may be true or false, because they agree in their use of words, in what they call "obedience" or regard as "cruelty." But this does not mean that there is a one-to-one correspondence between words and things, or even a more general agreement between language, on the one hand, and the world, on the other. A language is not a mirror of the world, nor a theory about reality, nor even a description of reality that can be compared with what is described.[20] It is, rather, "our *method* of repre-

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sentation"—the *way* we look at things (1958a, para. 50, emphasis added).

Language creates the conceptual space within which reality is beheld. Wittgenstein gives expression to this idea by saying, "Grammar tells us what kind of object anything is." To illustrate, he adds, "Theology as grammar" (ibid., para. 373). If you are looking for God, scientific instruments will be of no use because God is not *that kind* of object. If you want to know whether someone has been negligent, your inquiry might focus on such things as what the person knew, or should have known, at the time she acted. Answers to these questions, in turn, will not be found by consulting a scientist about brain states, but by reconstructing a sequence of events (e.g., meetings, an exchange of letters, phone calls, etc.) and ascertaining what a person would have, or should have, known as a result of these exchanges. The grammar of an expression like "would have known" gives the criteria for its use, that is, the sort of circumstances in which one has reason to say, "this person would have known such-and-such."

Wittgenstein's notion of grammar has been compared to a method of measurement, such as the use of a yardstick to determine the length of things (see Hacker 1972, 163–65). The yardstick, or standard of measure, is independent of, and logically antecedent to, the thing that is being measured. Similarly, grammar is not "based on" the structure of reality (on what is being measured in this analogy); it is autonomous. Grammar cannot come into conflict with reality because the structure of reality is a projection of our grammar.[21] Thus, Wittgenstein writes, "as long as one remains in the domain of the True-False-Game a change in grammar can only take us from one such game to another, but never from something true to something false" (quoted in ibid., 164–65). If we measure the weight of an object instead of its length, we will get different results—measurements in pounds rather than inches. But this is not, of course, a movement from something true to something false; it is a shift from the grammar of length to the grammar of weight, from one aspect of reality to another.[22]

This understanding of language can be pushed in the direction of cultural relativism, particularly if one thinks of cultures as unique and largely incommensurable constellations of vocabularies, grammars, and language-games, each with its own mutually exclusive projection of "reality."[23] The trouble with this line of reasoning is that it assumes what it seeks to prove, namely that the vocabularies, grammars, lan-

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guage-games of different cultures *are* unique and incommensurable.[24] To assume such incommensurable diversity is to miss Wittgenstein's point that while language is not founded in a common reality that is antecedent to language, it *is* deeply rooted in the fact that human beings "act in such-and-such ways, e.g., *punish* certain actions, *establish* the state of affairs thus-and-so, *give orders*, render accounts, describe colors, take an interest in others' feelings" (quoted in ibid., 219, original emphasis).

No doubt there are great differences between Azande witchcraft and modern science, between the grammar of magic and the grammar of physics. But alongside such differences, do not forget the common activities of human life—exchanging gifts, telling stories, forecasting the future, blaming someone. And do not overlook what is common to our nature—that we become ill, that our faces are expressive, that we must act in order to carry out plans, that we can remember some of our past but not every bit of it. In addition to the varied customs of the world's cultures, there are common activities so integral a part of human life that they usually go unmentioned. And coupled with this common form of life, there is, as a philosopher sympathetic to Wittgenstein once wrote, "a massive core of human thinking that has no history . . . categories and concepts which, in their most fundamental character, change not at all" (Strawson 1959, xiv).[25]

This common core of human thought must include the concept of "objectivity" if by this we mean the acknowledgment of something independent of subjective experience. One chain of reasoning that leads to this conclusion can be briefly summarized as follows: thought presupposes language, which presupposes a distinction between the correct and incorrect use of words; the correct use of words, in turn, does not mean use that *seems* correct to the speaker, but use that *is* correct according to criteria that are independent of the speaker, i.e., objective criteria.[26] To deny that the distinction between things seeming thus-and-so and things being thus-and-so belongs to "the central core of human thinking" is to deny that there are any conditions that must be satisfied if the production of "acoustic phenomena" is to qualify as speaking a language.[27] If, on the other hand, the notion of objectivity is admitted to the core of necessary concepts, then many other closely related concepts must be admitted as well. These include the notion of "following a rule," the concepts of "same

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and "different," the idea of "justification," and the internally related notion of "appealing to something independent" (Wittgenstein 1958a, para. 265).

Wittgenstein elaborates the notion of criteria primarily in connection with words used to describe mental states and dispositions. One of the important themes of these investigations is the directness or immediacy of our perception of reality, of the nexus between our thoughts and the world. For example, Wittgenstein describes the relationship between an expectation and its fulfillment in the following way: "I want to say: 'If someone could see the mental process of expectation, he would necessarily be seeing *what* was expected' . . . he would not have to *infer* it from the process he perceived" (ibid., para. 452–53; also 1967, para. 56). Of course we sometimes do infer from our experience a further fact. Seeing dark clouds, we conclude it is going to rain. Oftentimes, however, we apprehend something directly, without induction. We catch a glimpse of someone and recognize an old friend, without inferring this from the person's appearance.

Wittgenstein's account of the internal relation between a word or expression and the criteria for its use rearranges the conceptual topography Rorty has urged upon us. "When we say, and *mean*, that such-and-such is the case, we—and our meaning—do not stop anywhere short of the fact; but we mean: *this-is-so*" (ibid., para. 95, original emphasis).[28] Wittgenstein's claim is not that a true proposition corresponds to a reality that is given independently of language, but that there is no conceptual gap between the sort of thing that can be thought (or said) and the sort of thing that can be the case in the world.[29] That things are thus-and-so is both the content of experience *and* (if we are not mistaken) an aspect of the world. Thought can, of course, go awry, as when we articulate a belief that is false. But there is no necessary gap between thought as such and things being thus-and-so in reality.

What follows from the difference between Rorty's claim that there is no external vantage point from which to verify the correspondence between a belief and a "language-independent determinate reality" and Wittgenstein's view that thought and reality meet in language? Just this: in Rorty's conception, the world is absorbed into a kind of communal solipsism that allows only a causal nexus between thought and reality, whereas in Wittgenstein's account, what can be thought (or said) lies within the same conceptual space that encompasses what can be the case, so that the content of an experience can become a

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reason for holding a particular belief. To illustrate the difference: on Rorty's account, the sound of a person screaming can cause the hearer to believe someone nearby is in trouble; whereas on Wittgenstein's view, the sound of someone screaming is a reason for thinking someone is in trouble. This experience—hearing the scream of someone in trouble—is possible because, in learning a language, we are educated in a technique *and* in a way of seeing. In other words, we are brought up in such a way that the world comes into view just insofar as we learn the criteria for recognizing such things as "a person nearby being in trouble."

I began this section by characterizing the concept of objectivity as a way of marking the distinction between the experience of an object and the object of experience. I now want to conclude the section by taking note of the fact that this distinction is drawn *within* the boundaries of what it makes sense to say. "The scream of someone in trouble" is independent of the hearer's thinking, but it is not external to what can be thought (or said). And it is because the world impinges on our experience in this way, from within the boundaries of the thinkable, that reality can be both independent of our experience and rationally related to it. Rorty is right to say that "Wittgenstein naturalizes language," but wrong to equate Wittgenstein's naturalism with a causal account of belief. Giving reasons for holding a belief takes us outside the realm of nature if by "nature" we mean the domain of law-like generalizations. But it does not take us into the supernatural. Rather, we are taught the criteria for recognizing states of affairs in the world, criteria for what counts as a reason to believe that things are thus-and-so. Having been educated in *this* "way of seeing," we come to dwell in the space of reasons, and this form of life becomes "second nature" to us.

III. THIS COMPLICATED FORM OF LIFE

Rorty divides schools of philosophy into two types: those that give primacy to the relation among members of a particular community (solidarity) and those that give primacy to the relation between thought and reality (objectivity). Philosophers preoccupied with the latter relation have often been in search of an independent measure, or vantage point, from which local custom and opinion could be judged.[30] Rorty thinks this quest is no longer open to us and that it is time to acknowledge history and culture, in lieu of reason and na-

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ture, as the only "foundations" possible for our beliefs. Many of us resist this substitution of solidarity for objectivity, according to Rorty, because to accept "intersubjective agreement" in place of knowledge, the particular in place of the universal, would also require us to acknowledge the contingency of even our deepest convictions.

My response to Rorty's argument has been twofold. First, I have tried to show that solidarity, which affirms the shared beliefs of "a particular collection of human beings," *itself* presupposes a deeper agreement in the way human beings naturally react to things. Without what Wittgenstein calls "the common behavior of mankind," there could be no "agreement in judgments," no "going on in the same way," and, hence, no "agreement in opinions." We are able to form beliefs, to communicate them to others, and to determine whether we share the same belief only insofar as we agree in what we regard as "a belief," as "a belief about such and such," and as "an agreement in belief." To the extent that this "agreement in judgments" flows from a deeper "agreement in form of life," then, Rorty's claim to the contrary notwithstanding, there *is* something "'beneath' socialization [and] prior to history which is definatory of the human" (1989, viii).

The second part of my brief against Rorty's postmodern manifesto is that the human form of life—the life of those who speak a language—both presupposes and exhibits the distinction between things seeming thus-and-so and things being thus-and-so. This claim, like the one just summarized, rests in part on a transcendental argument, that is, an argument that begins with something we take for granted and then shows what is indispensable to this undoubted object or experience. In particular, I have tried to show that both language itself and such language-games as correcting an error in measurement, or criticizing a judgment as "subjective," presuppose the concept of objectivity. The speakers of a language must be able to draw a distinction between what seems to be the case and what is the case, between the use of a word according to a rule and the mere appearance of such use, if they are going to qualify as *speakers of a language.*

These two claims—that the shared beliefs of a particular community depend on a deeper agreement in form of life, and that the concept of objectivity is necessary to language—define the intelligible limits of "difference." Insofar as arguments against objectivity must be articulated in a language, they are self-refuting, for the notion of objectivity is not only necessary to language itself, it is also interwoven

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with the linguistic practices in which "making an argument" gets its sense: practices such as giving reasons, appealing to criteria, justifying conclusions. Those who dismiss the idea of human nature in favor of a thoroughgoing historicism must be able to show either that "agreement in judgments" is not essential to language or that such agreement is possible without "agreement in form of life." Rorty (1989, 15) is able to avoid these conclusions, but only because he is willing to regard the people of other cultures, not as human beings who speak a language, but as "certain kinds of organisms" in relation to which we find it advantageous to "pair off," or correlate, the "marks and noises" they make with "those we make."

Although I have stressed the transcendental aspects of Wittgenstein's philosophy, the conception of human beings that emerges from this reading should not be confused with the Enlightenment subject who, stripped naked of custom and prejudice, is able to comprehend necessary truths in the floodlight of pure reason. There *is* something contingent at the core of human experience—but it lies deeper than history and culture. Our concepts and their grammar, and, hence, "the possibilities of phenomena," bear the marks of our *life*. Hearing someone scream can belong to the criteria for believing a person nearby is in trouble because the range of human hearing extends just so far, because we have a capacity for fear, for sympathy, for surprise. If the human voice were not expressive, if we had telepathic powers, if we could fly like birds, or if we were invulnerable to harm, then our concepts would be different, and there might not be such things as "a person nearby in trouble."

NOTES

1. Many of the themes Rorty develops in this essay also figure prominently in his other works. See especially Rorty 1979, 1982, and 1989.
2. Rorty's reference to "our" cultural inheritance is consistent with his self-conscious ethnocentrism.
3. This acknowledgment of our ethnocentric limits comes easily for Rorty not only because he has deconstructed the (metaphysical) subject and object of knowledge—the knower and the known—but also because, as a self-proclaimed pragmatist, Rorty is not interested in whether our beliefs are true "absolutely," but only in whether holding certain beliefs produces good consequences for us. See Rorty 1982 and 1991, 126–50.
4. This understanding of philosophy's burden is criticized in Rorty 1979.

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5. See especially Wittgenstein 1958a, 1958b, 1967, and 1980.
6. See Rorty 1991, 126–50; Rorty 1982, 160–75; and Rorty 1979, ch. 6.
7. Wittgenstein says, "It is of the greatest importance that hardly ever does a quarrel arise between human beings, over whether the colour of this object is the same as the colour of that one, the length of this stick the same as the length of that one, etc." Quoted in Malcolm 1995, 149.
8. Cf. Putnam 1995, 32–38.
9. It may be noted that Wittgenstein was aware that his stress on "agreement in judgments" would be subject to misinterpretation, for he goes on to say that this "seems to abolish logic but does not do so" (1958a, para. 242). We misunderstand Wittgenstein if, like Rorty, we take "intersubjective agreement" as the criterion of "following a rule correctly." This view conflates the normative concept of following a rule with the empirical question of how many people, or what proportion of the community, act in such-and-such a way. The behavior that accords with a rule, such as writing 2, 4, 6, 8 when asked to write a series of even numbers, is *internally* related to the rule itself, and does not *logically* depend on how others respond. That virtually everyone regards 2, 4, 6, 8 as a series of even numbers shows that we are playing the same game, but it is the series, 2, 4, 6, 8, which is in accord with *this* rule and *not* the fact that virtually everyone agrees that this is a series of even numbers. See Baker and Hacker 1984.
10. See also 1967, para. 102 ff., where Wittgenstein allows for the possibility of our being able to understand creatures who do not talk, but resemble human beings in other ways.
11. Further considerations in favor of this understanding of "form of life," which stresses the notion of a distinctively *human* form of life and which emphasizes Wittgenstein's concern with a form of *life* in which the natural and social are fused, can be found in Cavell 1979 and 1989, 40–74; Pears 1969, ch. 9; Malcom 1986; and Garver 1994.
12. Although Rorty finds much of Wittgenstein's philosophy congenial to his own conception of ethnocentric solidarity, Rorty recognizes that Wittgenstein's anthropocentrism poses a threat to this conception (see Rorty 1982). In responding to this challenge, Rorty is led to dismiss other aspects of Wittgenstein's philosophy, such as his notion of internal relations. Defending Wittgenstein against Rorty's critique is beyond the scope of this paper, except to note that the main objection Rorty brings to bear against those aspects of Wittgenstein's philosophy he rejects is the question-begging complaint that they extend the life of controversies that have preoccupied Western philosophy since Descartes, but which Rorty no longer finds compelling.
13. See also Wittgenstein 1967, paras. 222–25, 350–55, 390, and 594; Wittgenstein 1980, 31; and Wittgenstein 1958b, 103.
14. See Davidson's own reaction to Rorty's reading in 1990, 120–38.
15. See Wittgenstein's discussion of the difference between seeing and imagining in 1967, para. 627 ff.

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16. Here Wittgenstein rejects his own earlier view, set forth in 1961.
17. This is an overstatement. For a detailed account of the reasoning that led Wittgenstein from the *Tractatus* to the *Philosophical Investigations*, see Hacker 1972, 86–111.
18. This is one of the implications of Wittgenstein's famous "private language argument."
19. Rorty does not register this distinction, perhaps because he subscribes to Quine's view that there are no such things as analytical truths. See 1991, 126–61.
20. If it were such a description, a metalanguage would be necessary to guide the comparison between the descriptive language and the reality it describes, which leaves us where we started.
21. One consequence of this view is that a scientific description of the world has no logical priority over any other kind of description, a point on which Wittgenstein and Rorty agree.
22. Wittgenstein's account of grammar has important affinities with Putnam's "internal realism." See Putnam 1990 and 1994.
23. It should be noted that Rorty resists being called a cultural relativist (1991, 24 ff.). The charge is levelled in Putnam 1995, 74–75.
24. Complete incommensurability would make translation impossible. See Putnam 1981, 114–17.
25. Putnam makes a similar point, arguing that "we share a huge fund of assumptions and beliefs about what is reasonable with even the most bizarre culture we can succeed in interpreting at all" (1981, 119).
26. I cannot here defend the claim that thought presupposes language, expect to say that Wittgenstein's private language argument raises serious doubts about the possibility of thinking without language.
27. The phrase *acoustic phenomena*, is Jerry Fodor's, quoted in Hunter 1973, 148.
28. It may be noted that, in writing these words, Wittgenstein seems to be feigning the awe he once felt in contemplating "'this queer thing, thought'" (1958a, para. 428). But his aim is not to dismiss the possibility of catching reality "in our net," but to restore this notion to "the form of a truism" (ibid., para. 95).
29. Wittgenstein says, "the object of our thought is not a shadow of the fact" (1958b, 32). I am here drawing upon McDowell 1994.
30. For a recent defense of this quest, see Nagel 1997.

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Edward Feser

HAYEK ON SOCIAL JUSTICE: REPLY TO LUKES AND JOHNSTON

ABSTRACT: *Hayek's attack on the ideal of social justice, though long ignored by political theorists, has recently been the subject of a number of largely unsympathetic studies (those of Lukes and Johnston being the most recent) in which his critique is dismissed as at best simply mistaken and at worst frivolous. The responses to Hayek's case against social justice, however, fail to draw any blood, for they do not seriously deal with Hayek's central claim that the very notion of social justice is incoherent.*

In the debate over the central themes of classical liberalism and libertarianism, the work of F. A. Hayek has received as much attention as that of any other writer, if not more. Yet curiously, though much of this debate has centered on the issue of social or distributive justice,[1] Hayek's distinctive position on this issue, developed most extensively in the second volume of his *Law, Legislation, and Liberty,* entitled *The Mirage of Social Justice* (1976), has received little notice. Or at least it has until recently. In the last few years, a number of studies have at last dealt with Hayek's critique of the ideal of social justice. Though a mere handful of brief and largely expository accounts were available in the first decade or so after the publication of *The Mirage of Social Justice* (e.g., Barry 1979, 137–43; Gray 1984, 71–75), a number of re-

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cent works have treated Hayek's position critically and (in some cases) at length—the papers by Steven Lukes and David Johnston in an issue of this journal devoted to Hayek being the most recent examples (Kukathas 1989; Shklar 1990; Kley 1994; Plant 1994; Gamble 1996; Shearmur 1996; Johnston 1997; Lukes 1997). The authors of these works, almost without exception, have concluded that at best, Hayek is simply wrong, and at worst that what he has to say about social justice is of little value (though Shearmur is somewhat sympathetic). Lukes, for example, remarks that Hayek's position is, insofar as it is paid attention to at all, considered "eccentric but not challenging," and that perhaps it has in fact "been neglected justly" (1997, 67). Another writer, though deigning at least to allude to Hayek's view, refuses even to respond to it, considering it a "waste [of] time" to do so (Haworth 1994, 142).[2]

I suspect that both the commonness—and the harshness—of this sort of judgment is due to the sheer radicalness of Hayek's position. For his claim is nothing less than that *there simply is, and can be, no such thing as social or distributive justice*. The gut reaction the typical contemporary political theorist is bound to have to such a thesis is, I think, that *surely* it cannot be right. Surely it just *can't* be that, in developing theories of social justice of great sophistication, and in fighting for the implementation of government policies which would make for a more socially just society, so many thinkers and activists have been, not merely *mistaken*, but thoroughly deluded, chasing after a "mirage," to use Hayek's description. Yet that, I want to echo Hayek in suggesting, is precisely what they have been doing. I want here to show that the criticisms that have been made of Hayek's position are entirely without force, for they simply fail to come to terms with the central claim of that position, namely that we cannot make sense of the notion of social justice in the context of a market economy. The upshot will be that Hayek's challenge to the ideal of social justice is one that has not been met, and that, given its intrinsic plausibility and the failure of the criticisms so far made of it, is unlikely to be met. At the very least, I believe it will be shown that the harsh and peremptory dismissal of Hayek's position so common among his critics is entirely unjustified.

I will begin by presenting as clear and systematic a summary of Hayek's position as I can. This is necessary because, it must be admitted, Hayek's argument in *The Mirage of Social Justice* is not laid out in the most straightforward fashion, and he tends to jump around a bit

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from point to point, so that the main lines of criticism are not always distinguished, nor the arguments for them explicitly spelled out. (This is, no doubt, one reason why his critics might discern less merit in his case than is really there.) Afterward, I will isolate the various sorts of response that have been made to Hayek, and try to show that they all miss the mark.

Hayek's Critique of the Ideal of Social Justice

Hayek's attack on social justice consists of three main distinct but interrelated lines of criticism. He argues, first, that the very notion of social justice is meaningless in the context of a market economy; second, that any attempt to achieve social justice will inevitably fail; and third, that any attempt fully and consistently to attain social justice will lead to totalitarianism.[3] We shall look at each in turn.

(1) *The notion of social justice is incoherent, without any clear meaning, within the context of a market economy.*

This first line of criticism is, as I have indicated, the most important and devastating of the three; though it is also the one that Hayek's critics tend quickly to dismiss or ignore altogether.[4] It is also the most original. Other classical liberal and libertarian writers have hinted at this point, as Nozick does when he notes that to speak of "distributive" justice is misleading since it implies—erroneously—that there is some agency responsible for the "distribution" of wealth in a society, a distribution which, if it came about in this way, would understandably be thought to be evaluable in terms of justice or injustice (Nozick 1974, 149). But even Nozick writes as if there really were a question of social or distributive justice, the right answer to which is his libertarian "entitlement" conception of justice. Hayek's claim is the more radical one that there simply is and can be *no such thing* as social justice within a market order.

His argument for this claim can be summed up as follows: Social or distributive justice is supposed to be a matter of a just distribution of wealth, income, etc., in a society. But a distribution can be just or unjust only if there is some person or persons who, intentionally and with foresight, bring it about. And in a market economy, there are no such persons; the "distribution" of wealth is a result of an impersonal process, unintended and unforeseen. So it does not make sense to speak of a just or unjust distribution of wealth in a market economy,

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and there cannot be any such thing as social justice in a market economy (Hayek 1976, 67–70).

We tend to think otherwise, Hayek says, for the following reasons: (a) We tend to personify "society," to speak of it as if it were something quasi-personal that exists over and above individuals and that "acts" or "treats" individuals in a certain way. But this is merely a crude anthropomorphism on a par with those characteristic of primitive, superstitious kinds of religious thinking (Hayek 1976, 62–63). (b) We tend to feel a sense of injustice when we see that those we consider unworthy prosper and those we consider deserving do not. But these feelings, though understandable, are misplaced, since there is no one who has acted justly or unjustly. (We have the same feelings when we see people suffer as a result of natural disasters, cases where it is clear that, strictly speaking, though a misfortune has been suffered, no *injustice* has been done.) (Ibid., 68.) (c) We tend to think of certain occupations as having a greater "value to society" than others, though they are less well rewarded in the marketplace. But there is no such thing as value to *society*, because there is no such thing as a "society" existing over and above individuals. There is only value to particular individuals, and different services will differ in value to different individuals. (And we have no criterion of what value services have to different individuals *apart from the market.*) (Ibid., 75–77.) (d) We tend to feel a sense of injustice at disappointed economic expectations or the loss of an accustomed standard of living. But (apart from cases where one specifically contracts with another for something), there is no moral basis for a claim of injustice, since the change in economic conditions is the result, not of anyone's design, but of blind, impersonal market processes (ibid., 93). (e) We tend to resent the high earnings of those whose function in the economic system we don't understand (e.g., stock speculators), and, in general, of those whose work is more enjoyable or better rewarded than ours is. But this is a result of ignorance and envy, respectively, and has nothing to do with justice or injustice (ibid., 77, 98).

The central idea behind Hayek's first line of criticism, then, is that the whole notion of social justice implicitly presupposes that some agency or other is responsible for the doling out of shares of wealth, and must be held accountable for doing so in a just manner; a presupposition which is manifestly false. Now of course nobody, not even the most unreconstructed socialist, *really* believes there is such an agency. That is, nobody believes that there is some godlike super-

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mind or committee of super-minds who dictate who is to have what; nor, surely, do many believe in a Hegelian World-spirit who might plausibly be thought somehow to pull strings so that economic distribution comes out a certain way. And though there may be a few who believe that the economy is secretly run from a smoke-filled room somewhere, I'm going to go out on a limb and suppose that this thesis too is unworthy of serious consideration. Still, a great many people, almost universally on the Left and even to a very great extent on the Right, thoughtlessly and unrelentingly speak *as if* they believed in such a thing. One routinely hears, in political discussion, about how "society" owes this or that to this or that group, or how this or that group or individual has been done wrong by "society." That is, people speak *as if* society were some entity over and above the particular individuals that live within some particular geographical, political, or ethnic boundary. But as everyone knows, it *isn't*; and in every case where it is alleged that someone has been dealt an injustice by society, or is owed something by society, very little thought is required to see that, insofar as it can coherently be asserted that an injustice has been done or that someone is owed something, the responsible (or allegedly responsible) party or parties must be some particular individual or group of individuals: corporation board members, local officials, government bureaucrats, parents, and the like. Even though everyone knows that, as Mrs. Thatcher so famously put it, "There is no such thing as society" (in the relevant sense of "society"), the fact that everyone keeps speaking as if there were suggests that the notion of "social justice" cannot be made sense of *without* assuming that some agency exists that can be held responsible for the distribution of wealth. My own suspicion is that, because so many believe that there *is* such a thing as social justice, they constantly find themselves talking about "society" as if it were a quasi-personal agent, and implicitly assume that there must be *some* sense in which this is true. Hayek's point is that because there *isn't* a sense in which it is true, the very notion of social justice is confused, incoherent, and therefore should be abandoned, along with the moral outlook and policy recommendations that rest on it.

Now as the reader has no doubt noticed, Hayek attaches an important qualification to his claim: He says that the notion of social justice is incoherent *within a market economy*. So it might be thought that the obvious response to Hayek is simply to call for the abolition of the market economy. Hayek indeed recognizes this as a possible response,

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and appears to grant that, in a centralized or command economy, where a body of officials are directly responsible for determining the economic standing of each individual in society, the idea of a just distribution of wealth is perfectly coherent.

Before we look at Hayek's response to the possibility of social justice in a command economy, though, it is important to understand exactly what this must involve. Mere interventionism and welfarism aren't enough. Both far-reaching government intervention in the economy and extensive social welfare measures are, and long have been, features of contemporary, essentially market-based societies, and Hayek fully intended his critique of the ideal of social justice to apply to its influence in these societies. An interfered-with market economy is still a market economy, and the "distribution" of wealth is still determined by blind market processes. State-sponsored *redistribution* doesn't affect this in the least, precisely because it is *re*distribution. Given the way the original distribution was determined, the redistribution, however else it may or may not be justified, cannot, if Hayek is right, be justified on the grounds that it is the correction of an *injustice*. So the only way for "social justice" to be given any meaning is to institute a full-blown socialist economic order, a top-down command economy; that is, in classic Hayekian language, to transform society from an evolving spontaneous order into a static, planned "organization."

Now Hayek suggests that the imposition of a socialist order, given the restrictions on personal freedom it involves, is itself something that might be criticized on moral grounds (Hayek 1976, 64). And indeed, not only libertarians, but also modern egalitarian liberals, have made a case that socialism is *itself* unjust precisely because it so radically limits personal freedom. But Hayek does not himself pursue this theme. Rather, he argues that the attempted realization of social justice through the imposition of a socialist order is doomed to failure and will bring about results far worse than the circumstances the advocate of social justice wants to alleviate. This brings us to Hayek's second and third lines of criticism:

(2) *Any attempt to achieve "social justice" will inevitably fail.*

Hayek's reasons for making this claim are three. (a) Trying to attain social justice would involve distributing wealth and income according to some moral standard, such as desert, need, merit, etc. But there are no generally agreed-upon standards of desert, need, merit, and the like; and even if there were, there is no-agreed upon way hierarchi-

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cally to *order* or *rank* these standards. So there is no basis upon which an agency could decide upon a "correct" distribution of wealth and income (Hayek 1976, 76). (b) Even if such standards, and a hierarchy of standards, were available, no governing body could possibly have the knowledge of each individual's circumstances required in order to distribute wealth according to those standards (ibid.). (c) Eliminating the market economy so as to give content to the notion of social justice would destroy the very process that alone can produce the wealth that the advocate of social justice wants to redistribute (Hayek 1976, chs. 10 and 11, passim; Hayek 1988).

All of these points draw on the sorts of considerations about knowledge, the limitations on it, and how it is made use of in a market-based society, that Hayek and his teacher Ludwig von Mises are famous for drawing to our attention. This is especially true of point (c), for as Mises and Hayek argued, no socialist economic order can possibly make use of the dispersed bits of knowledge of economic conditions that, in a capitalist economy, are encapsulated in market prices, as efficiently as a market economy can; nor can they, for this reason, maintain the populations characteristic of modern nation-states even at subsistence levels. Though the details of Hayek's and Mises's arguments are controversial, there does appear to be wide agreement that the gist of their case does indeed show that full-blown socialism is unworkable.[5] Hayek also argued that even many measures undertaken in the name of "social justice" in the context of a market order—wage and price controls and the like—disrupt the working of the price system and so have negative repercussions of just the sort exhibited in a socialist economy, though, of course, repercussions of less severity (Hayek 1976, 70–73).

The measures that a government attempting to realize social justice will have to take in order to surmount these problems lead to the third and final difficulty with the ideal of social justice identified by Hayek:

(3) *Any attempt fully and consistently to attain "social justice" will lead to totalitarianism.*

The words "fully" and "consistently" here are important. For one might be tempted to dismiss this third point on the grounds that even while numerous measures advocated in the name of social justice have been implemented in the various contemporary market-based societies, they cannot plausibly be said to have resulted in totalitarianism, even if they have led to some restrictions on personal freedom.

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But the point is that none of these measures can be said to have brought about the attainment of social justice, certainly not if "social justice" is construed, as it usually is, as a leveling of economic inequalities; they can at best be said to have brought about an approximation of social justice. This is evidenced by the fact that partisans of social justice tend always to complain that their ideal has been forgotten or "sold out" by the party in power, however far to the left that party and its programs. Moreover, we must not forget Hayek's first point that, so long as we are talking about a market-based society, no matter how extensive the public welfare measures existing within it are, they cannot be justified by reference to social justice, since there is and can be no such thing in a market order. As we have seen, Hayek's claim is that there can only be such a thing in a socialist order, and it is hardly implausible to suppose that that sort of order might result in totalitarianism.

Hayek thinks that there are good reasons to suppose that the history of the socialist countries *had* to end in totalitarianism. First, the more individuals see their economic standing as dependent on government action, the more they will demand that government distribute rewards according to some moral standard; and the more the government tries to achieve this, the more it will have to put individual behavior under its control. This is a self-accelerating tendency, the end result of which is a totalitarian system (Hayek 1976, 68; Hayek 1944). Second, to distribute wealth according to some moral standard, in a society in which there are no agreed-upon standards, will require that a standard or hierarchy of standards be imposed on all individuals, that all individuals be organized to further the realization of one set of values (Hayek 1976, 75–76). And, third, social justice is incompatible with the rule of law, i.e., freedom from the arbitrary use of government power.

Hayek's third claim requires elaboration. According to Hayek, in a command economy (the only sort in which "social justice" has any meaning), individuals will not be treated equally under the law, since, given that individuals are unequal in strength, intelligence, talents, and so forth, government will have to impose greater duties and burdens on those with greater abilities if it is to maintain an equal distribution (1976, 82). Moreover, there are no general rules of conduct applying to individuals that can guarantee any particular distribution, since for there to be such rules, individuals following them would have to be able to know not only whom their economic actions will

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benefit or harm, but also what effect everybody else's actions will have; and this cannot be known. In the absence of general rules that a government could enforce in order to attain social justice, it will have to intervene arbitrarily at various times and places to maintain a given distribution (ibid., 70, 85–86).

This dovetails with a final point in support of (3), namely, that widespread adoption of the ethic of social justice can only lead to the proliferation of attitudes destructive of a free society: envy; an unwillingness to hold each other to standards of self-reliance that might entail the disapproval of others if not lived up to; and, in general, dependency. Given this problem, along with some of the others we have mentioned, such as the lack of objective standards by which a government can determine a just distribution, political life can only degenerate into a struggle between warring special interests, a spoils system in which bureaucracies dole out favors to those parties powerful enough to capture them (1976, 98–100).

In short, then, Hayek's argument against social justice is just this: We cannot do without a market economy, since no other economic system is compatible with freedom or is even workable; but in the context of such an economy, the notion of "social" or distributive justice is meaningless, and its pursuit is not only quixotic, but pernicious, since it leads to the destruction of the market order on which freedom and prosperity rest.

In denying the legitimacy of the ideal of social justice, Hayek does not deny the importance of justice per se. On the contrary, he is most eager to emphasize that justice properly understood, as a procedural matter of conformity to abstract rules of individual conduct (rather than a substantive matter of the attainment of some concrete end, distributive or otherwise), is crucial to the proper functioning of the market order (a theme developed throughout *The Mirage of Social Justice*). Given Hayek's account of the role of the market in allowing us to utilize dispersed economic knowledge, he argues that adherence to the rules that make the market possible—noncoercion, respect for private property, contracts, and the like—"is the only procedure yet discovered in which information widely dispersed among millions of men can effectively be used for the benefit of all—and used by assuring to all an individual liberty desirable for itself on ethical grounds" (1976, 70–71). Though the market allows for the possibility that some may suffer the misfortune of unmerited failure, it at the same time

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provides the best chance for all to have their wants satisfied (ibid., 70).[6]

Responses to Hayek

We now turn to the critical responses to Hayek's case against social justice that have begun to appear in the last few years. Those of Lukes and Johnston are perhaps the most extended discussions, so they will receive the most attention; but we shall also note some lines of criticism to be found in other writers. As earlier indicated, almost all of these replies have concluded that Hayek's case is ultimately unconvincing. I have detected 13 distinct lines of criticism of Hayek, some of which are put forward by more than one writer.[7] All of them, I hope to show, fail to undermine Hayek's case and generally fail even seriously to address Hayek's central claim that "social justice" can have no meaning in the context of a market order.

I want to begin by disposing of what I take to be the most obviously weak criticisms.

i. Hayek, in claiming that social justice is unattainable and leads to totalitarianism, implies that advocates of social justice believe this themselves and are knowingly deceiving the public when they defend policies by appealing to it; but this is implausible.

This objection is made by Lukes (1997, 74) without appealing to any textual support; and as far as I can tell, there isn't any. Hayek nowhere asserts or implies that advocates of social justice are cynically appealing to an ideal *they know to be* illusory and pernicious. Indeed, this sort of thing would be untypical of Hayek, who, as Schumpeter stated, "hardly ever attributes to opponents anything beyond intellectual error" (as quoted on the back cover of the University of Chicago Press paperback edition of *The Road to Serfdom*). More importantly, nothing in Hayek's arguments entails such a view.[8]

ii. Hayek's position amounts to a paranoid conspiracy theory that posits a collusion between governments, unions, and the like to destroy our freedom.

This objection, presented by Shklar (1990, 80–81), is intended less as an exegesis of Hayek's text than as a diagnosis of what she apparently believes to be a pathology underlying Hayek's attack on social justice. "Invisible hand" accounts of human society of the sort Hayek and other free-market advocates favor, she says, though "originally meant to free us from irrational fears of conspiracy," ironically present

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us with a "Manichaean world" where evil forces conspire to destroy our liberties (ibid., 81). "It is a common observation of psychologists that most people prefer to see conspiracies rather than to recognize that no one is in charge at all. It is proof of our need to blame and accuse, and Hayek is no exception" (ibid.). Shklar wants to make the case that Hayek, in arguing *against* the reality of quasi-personal forces which determine our fate, is in fact in the grip of the idea that there *are* such forces.

What is there in Hayek's account that requires an explanation of it in terms of conspiratorial delusions? Is anyone who disagrees with a position thereby in the grip of the delusion that those who disagree with him are conspiring against him? And what exactly is it in the invisible hand approach that is supposed to lead to its exact *opposite*, i.e., the conspiratorial mentality? Shklar is less than vague in answering these questions; she gives no defense of her claims whatsoever. And Hayek is surely an unlikely target of such accusations in any case: It is a common theme of his work that those whose recommendations, if followed, would, in his view, lead us down the road to serfdom *do not understand* that that is what they are doing. Far from there being a conspiracy to destroy our liberties, Hayek argues (most famously in *The Road to Serfdom*) that it is often those who *most cherish* the freedoms of modern civilization who unwittingly adopt policies which in his view will lead to the subversion of those freedoms.

iii. Hayek's claim that disagreement on values undermines the possibility of distribution according to a moral principle is implausible, because many political theorists believe that value pluralism is compatible with the attainment of social justice.

This objection, from Lukes (1997, 75–76), appears to be little more than an argument from authority. Lukes simply notes that many contemporary thinkers, most famously Rawls, believe that justice is neutral as between the various conflicting values or conceptions of the good that various individuals and groups are committed to, so that social justice and value pluralism are compatible. "But no one other than Hayek takes value incommensurability and value pluralism to subvert the very idea of social justice, and it is difficult to understand why they should" (1997, 76). This misses the point of Hayek's argument, which is that *distributive* justice is supposed to be distribution according to some moral criterion, say, according to merit, or need, or so as to achieve equality of holdings. This sort of enterprise, by its very nature, *cannot* be neutral between conceptions of the good. And

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since there is no agreement on moral criteria, or on how to *rank* various criteria; and since, even if there were, no governing body could possibly have the knowledge required of individual circumstances properly to apply the criteria, this enterprise cannot possibly succeed. That is certainly a reason to believe that value pluralism and the attainment of social justice are incompatible; and to refute Hayek's argument, it is hardly adequate merely to note that many thinkers implicitly disagree with its conclusion.

An attempt to do more than this is suggested by Lukes's next objection (1997, 76):

iv. Hayek can't show that ignorance of individual circumstances means that government attempts to achieve social justice must always *be futile.*

If Lukes means by this that government may be able to improve, at least temporarily, the lot of particular individuals or groups, then he is certainly correct; but that isn't something Hayek would deny. For the attainment of social justice would involve much more than this, being a matter of a just distribution of resources *in society as a whole*, not merely the alleviation of this or that case of individual hardship. It would require knowledge of the circumstances of *all*, or at the very least *most*, of the members of society, something which, clearly, no governing authority can have.[9] (Lukes says that for Hayek to know that this is so "would require that Hayek had access to the very knowledge . . . that he declares to be inaccessible" (1997, 76). But why exactly it would require this is left mysterious; Lukes says nothing to support this claim.)

Johnston expresses a related objection when he says: "An egalitarian distribution of wealth . . . requires as little by way of agreement on ultimate ends as the goal of maximizing aggregate wealth" (1997, 88). This objection is almost entirely undefended. The only (implied) support Johnston gives for this claim is the further claim that "an *equal* distribution . . . would not presuppose agreement on the ends to which that wealth should be applied" (ibid.) But even if this latter claim is true, it is beside the point, which is precisely that *attainment* of such a distribution in the first place *would* require agreement on moral ends (as well as knowledge of individual circumstances, etc.). This is so even though the way the redistributed wealth is used *after* redistribution *wouldn't* require such agreement; in any case, nothing Johnston says shows otherwise.

Johnston provides us with another objection:

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v. Perhaps social justice can be achieved through indirect means, without the coercion involved in an organizational restructuring of society.

However, Johnston never suggests *how* indirect, non-organizational means might lead to social justice, or what sorts of indirect means he has in mind. Certainly none have ever been tried, nor do the advocates of social justice appear to believe that anything but organizational methods in the form of coercive governmental action can do the job. And it is hardly surprising that they should think this: It is a commonplace that people, left to their own devices, will tend to pursue their own self-interest, leading inevitably to inequalities in wealth and power.

Johnston (1997, 94–97) also argues that:

vi. Hayek ignores the fact that spontaneous orders like the market create organizational elements as well, so that they can be just as coercive as command economies.

That *some* organizational features will crop up in a market order is irrelevant, and that they must be coercive is dubious. Hayek's point is merely that to attempt to take control of society *as a whole*, so as to impose upon it some distributive pattern, must inevitably fail and degenerate into totalitarianism. This leaves open the possibility that smaller-scale organizational endeavors might feasibly undertake small-scale tasks. Indeed, many smaller-scale organizations in fact do so: Johnston's own examples, businesses and labor unions, are good ones. A particular feature of these examples accounts for why they *don't* have the untoward consequences that the attempt to reconstruct the whole of society on an organizational model would: They are completely voluntary enterprises, without the monopoly on the use of force that a social-justice-ensuring state would have to have. So the element of coercion is absent in these types of organizations. This allows for the circumstance that those organizations that are ill-suited to the realization of their stated aims will disappear, the market ensuring a kind of natural selection; while in the case of coercive and comprehensive governmental organization, no such automatic weeding out of failed and otherwise undesirable organizational elements is possible.

Johnston suggests that the market will, for all that, generate genuinely oppressive organizational elements because those who are dissatisfied with its results will band together to enact policies that will alter these results through coercive means. The suggestion seems to be that the problem with the market is that it generates an interest in

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attaining such goals as social justice, and these goals entail the institution in society of oppressive organizational features. How this is supposed to be a *defense* of social justice against Hayek, I'm not at all clear. The upshot seems rather to be that things are far worse than even Hayek imagined; that is, that not only outright socialism, but even (indirectly) the market order, will lead to coercive and disastrous measures in the name of "correcting" the market's results. Whether this rather Schumpeterian empirical analysis is correct is something that cannot be settled here. But in any case, it hardly counts as a refutation of the normative case against social justice.

Johnston's overall objection that the market generates features as oppressive as command economies might be thought to be bolstered, however, by a claim made by Plant (1994, 174–75) (and perhaps also Lukes 1997, 77–78), to the effect that Hayek's proposals are just as ill-conducive to the rule of law as he contends the ideal of social justice to be. What poses a danger to the rule of law in a regime guided by the ideal of social justice is that such a regime must be given a vast amount of discretionary power in the distribution of scarce resources such as education and health care (since different individuals and groups must be treated differently, given both the inequalities in people's abilities to provide such resources and the differences in their need for them). But the services Hayek would allow—police, courts, prisons, etc.—also require the use of resources and so also require a great amount of discretionary power on the part of the state (Plant 1994, 175). So the threat to the rule of law is no less real in a Hayekian society.

The main problem with this reply is the same one already noted with respect to Johnston's objection: It is hardly a defense of social justice, but rather merely a claim that things are as bad in a Hayekian order as in a society governed by social justice. Nor would this be enough to make for a stalemate between Hayek and his opponent, even if Plant were correct; for it does not address Hayek's main claim about the meaninglessness of the notion of social justice (much less his claim about its unworkability). Moreover, Hayek can counter that a regime free of the influence of the ideal of social justice will require *far less* in the way of discretionary power, since it is concerned with the use and distribution of far fewer resources. A classical liberal regime reduces discretionary power to the absolute minimum consistent with the existence of a state at all, whereas to make social justice the guiding principle of state action is positively to invite the prolif-

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eration of arbitrary state power. Further, it is dubious to suppose that a classical liberal state would require the sort of discretionary power in question, even in smaller amounts. For as Plant grants, it is the scarcity of many of the resources that a social justice-pursuing welfare state must distribute—health care, education, etc.—that leads it to treat individuals differently; while the resources a classical liberal state must "distribute," such as protection against crime and the like, seem hardly to be scarce. A qualified police officer is not nearly as difficult to find as a qualified doctor or educator, etc.

One more weak argument is again due to Lukes (1997, 71):

vii. Hayek's various objections against social justice contradict one another. For how can social justice be unworkable and lead to totalitarianism if it is a meaningless or incoherent notion in the first place?

The answer to this objection is that an incoherent or contradictory set of beliefs can lead to certain predictably disastrous courses of action just as well as a coherent one can; indeed, it is even more likely to do so. If I think that it is possible to draw a round square, then even though my belief is an incoherent one, we can predict that I will try to draw a round shape and/or a square shape, but will be unable to do both. Similarly, we can predict that policies directed toward social justice will aim at redistributing income a certain way, but that given the problems Hayek has noted, they will be unable to achieve that distribution and will end up destroying liberty in the process.

A number of other objections contend that Hayek's defense of the market appeals to the very sorts of considerations he denies the advocate of social justice; but these rely on readings of his arguments that are uncharitable, at best.

viii. Hayek contradicts himself since he judges the market order to be just on utilitarian grounds.

This objection, put forward by Lukes (1997, 74) (and perhaps hinted at by Johnston 1997, 88), is understandable given that Hayek often argues that the market order is the system most likely to satisfy the wants of the greatest number of people to the greatest possible extent, and thus is commonly described as giving a "utilitarian" defense of the market. But it is an unfair and misleading interpretation nonetheless. Lukes fails to cite any passage in which Hayek actually claims that the market order is *just* (and the whole point of his argument in *The Mirage of Social Justice* is that it is *neither* just *nor* unjust), much less any passage where he says it is just *because* it satisfies human desires; and as far as I know, there is no such passage. Moreover,

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Hayek was not a utilitarian in the usual sense (the theory associated with Bentham, Mill, etc.); his "utilitarianism" consisted entirely in the claim that the market order best satisfied human desires. There is nothing in this that commits him to saying that what is just *just is* whatever satisfies human desires. Thus, even if he held (as he no doubt did) that this alleged tendency of the market order provides us with moral grounds for supporting it, it doesn't follow that these are grounds of *justice*; for not all moral grounds *are* grounds of justice. Indeed, Hayek's argument against social justice itself is evidence that he didn't intend his defense of the market as a defense in terms of justice.

Similarly mistaken is Kley's claim (1994, 204) that:

ix. Hayek is just suggesting his own principle of distribution: "To each according to his market value."

Though Hayek does in fact believe that a market order will reward individuals according to the value their services have to others, he never puts this forward as a *moral justification* of the "distribution" determined by the market (much less as a "principle of distribution"—as if some agency in the market order distributed wealth according to a principle), but merely as a descriptive, factual claim. Again, his argument against social justice is itself decisive evidence that he doesn't intend it as a moral justification, since in his view the distribution of wealth simply isn't evaluable in moral terms at all in a market order.

Similarly misleading is the claim that Hayek must be contradicting himself because:

x. Even Hayek allows for a minimal safety net to protect those who are incapable of supporting themselves in the market.

This objection is made by a number of writers (Gamble 1996, 49; Kley 1994, 202; Lukes 1997, 73; Plant 1994, 175–76), and calls attention to a feature of Hayek's position that has always been an embarrassment to the more thoroughgoing libertarians among his admirers. For Hayek does indeed allow that "there is no reason why in a free society government should not assure to all protection against severe deprivation in the form of an assured minimum income, or a floor below which nobody need to descend" (1976, 87). But the important thing to note is that Hayek does not defend this claim on the basis of justice, "social" or otherwise, and explicitly rules out such a defense (Hayek 1994, 149). Though Hayek does say that measures against severe deprivation "may be felt to be a clear moral duty of all" (1976, 87), his defense of such measures seems to rest more on considera-

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tions such as the rather coldly pragmatic one that provision of such a minimum income is "in the interest of those who require protection against acts of desperation on the part of the needy" (1960, 285). And in any case, as already noted, even a moral defense is not necessarily a defense in terms of *justice*. So there are no grounds for the claim that Hayek is contradicting himself.

Still, as Plant argues (1994, 175–76), this concession of Hayek's doesn't sit well with the general tenor of his critique of social justice, for there is every reason to suppose that the government measures enacted merely to provide a safety net will inevitably become subject to the same difficulties that would plague an attempt to attain social justice. In particular, it is difficult to see how there could be agreed-upon standards of genuine destitution, or how the safety-net apparatus could avoid being subject to interest-group pressures and the like. (We might add that, given the prominence of the social-justice ethic among contemporary policy makers and in society at large, it is impossible that any safety net apparatus could be kept limited strictly to the functions Hayek would approve of.) But the upshot of this, of course, is not that there is anything wrong with Hayek's critique of social justice, but rather that he should extend that critique even to the provision of a minimal safety net.

Kukathas appears at least not to be misinterpreting Hayek when he argues (1989, 171–72) that:

xi. For Hayek justice is a matter of protecting entitlements; but what one is entitled to is itself an issue of social or distributive justice.

But this objection appears to beg the question against Hayek. Hayek's claim is that the traditional conception of justice, involving rules which govern the conduct of individuals and protect them against the expropriation of their property and the like, is coherent and necessary for the protection of the market order. And this conception is not a conception of *distributive* justice, since it says nothing about the makeup of the overall distribution of wealth in society as a whole; it is rather a purely procedural notion concerning the acquisition and transfer of individual holdings. So clearly, in Hayek's view, it *is* possible to make sense of entitlements without appealing to the notion of *social* or distributive justice. And of course in Hayek's view, no such appeal is possible in any case, for his argument is precisely that no sense can be made of that notion in the context of a market order. But Kukathas says nothing by way of response to that argument.

This is surprising given that, as we've seen, that argument is the

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one Hayek puts the most stress on. Yet not only Kukathas's objection, but also all the objections we have so far considered, fail to take that argument into account. At least some of these writers, though, do at least try to make some response to Hayek's central argument; and it is to these responses that we finally turn. The first, due to Kley (1994, 201–203), goes as follows:

xii. Hayek presupposes that the market is just a natural phenomenon, a "given" that is not evaluable in terms of justice or injustice; but this is false, since there are alternatives such as socialism and mixed economies.

In defending this objection, Kley makes much of the fact that the market is a product of human actions, and of rules which are subject to human alteration (ibid., 203). But Hayek, of course, never denies any of this. The market order is, as he famously reiterates in a number of works, "the result of human *action* but *not* of human *design*" (Hayek 1967); and this lack of design is the crucial point. The "distribution" of body hair among individuals is also the result of human action, and is even, presumably, subject to human alteration (through genetic engineering, say). But it would be absurd to conclude that *that* distribution is therefore evaluable in terms of justice or injustice. Hayek's point is just that the same thing applies to the distribution of wealth in society, since it, in general, arises spontaneously through the impersonal (as Kley concedes, ibid., 203) process of the market. Moreover, the existence of alternatives does not show that a thing is not "natural" in the relevant sense. Again, there are "alternatives" to the present "distribution" of body hair: We could require that those with an excess number of hair follicles be required to have them surgically removed and transplanted to the skin of relatively hairless people. Still, it is obvious that there is a perfectly good sense in which the current "distribution" of body hair is "natural" (indeed, it is natural in the most *natural* sense of "natural").

Of course, part of Hayek's argument is also that socialism does *not* in fact constitute a viable alternative. We are stuck with a market order of some kind. And as noted earlier, even in a market order that contains some aspects of socialism (a mixed economy), inequalities will develop, and because they arise from the impersonal (even though tampered-with) process of the market, they cannot be said to be just or unjust.

Apparently more formidable, though, is a final line of criticism, one pursued by Plant (1994, 169–171), Shklar (1990, 81), Lukes (1997,

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72–74), and Johnston (1997, 86–87), which can be summed up as follows:

xiii. Even if a given distribution is not intended, *it is still* foreseen, *and in any case, even if we are not responsible for the occurrence of unintended consequences, we are still responsible for how we react to them; so the distribution of wealth can in fact be just or unjust.*

One problem with this objection is that it isn't clear why the foreseeability of something entails that it is evaluable in terms of justice or injustice. To allude again to the case just considered, it is clearly foreseeable that a certain "distribution" of body hair will hold in society if left alone; and again, this is something that could be avoided or altered if we were inclined to interfere. But surely it would be absurd to describe the distribution of body hair as just or unjust. And the distribution of wealth isn't any different: We can foresee that the "distribution" of wealth in a market economy will have such-and-such a character (though only in very general terms; part of Hayek's point is that we can't foresee that this or that individual or group of individuals will succeed or fail), but nevertheless, no one is *responsible* for bringing a certain distribution about, so it doesn't follow that that distribution is just or unjust.

But the idea seems to be that we *can* respond to a given distribution, even if we are not responsible for it; and in the case of the distribution of wealth, unlike that of the distribution of body hair, we are dealing with something that has an important effect on the quality of people's lives. So there is, after all, a question of justice or injustice. Note first, however, that with this argument, what is just or unjust, strictly speaking, turns out *not* to be a given distribution as such; rather, it is *human reactions* (to a distribution) that are just or unjust. This at least implicitly concedes Hayek's point that only individual human beings and their actions can be just or unjust. But in conceding this, Hayek's opponents must, to be consistent, concede also that it *is* only *individuals'* reactions which are just or unjust; we cannot speak of "society's" reactions without slipping back into anthropomorphism (and indeed, to return to the point about foreseeability, it seems as if it would have to be something like "*society*" which does the foreseeing, not individuals, if this objection were to have any force against Hayek in the first place). It is not clear how, if it is *individuals'* actions we're talking about, the advocate of social justice can argue for the usual *government* programs put forward as what social justice demands; at best, it can only be the actions of individuals in

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their economic lives that are "socially" just or unjust (and of course, in this case, Hayek's point about the impossibility of rules of individual conduct that can guarantee a particular distribution still applies).

But there is, in any case, no reason to concede that the fact that we can respond to a given distribution shows that that response is properly described as *just* or *unjust*. The sorts of examples given by Hayek's opponents to support this claim don't show otherwise. Plant, for instance, describes an old woman blown over by a gust of wind into a pool of water, where she lies unconscious and face down, liable to drown (1994, 170–71). Even though the cause of this circumstance is an impersonal force, he says, it would be *unjust* for a person who witnessed this occurrence not to help the woman. But there is no reason to describe a failure to help the woman as *unjust* rather than merely as callous, or cruel, or wicked; and in fact it seems rather forced to call it unjust. The burden of proof is clearly on Hayek's opponent to show that it is unjust (and not just callous, etc.); for this case is much more similar to cases where questions of justice or injustice clearly do not apply (e.g., cases where one has suffered a misfortune such as losing a kidney, where it would not be unjust for one to refuse to give up his own kidney to save the other, even if it would be kind to do so) than it is to cases where an injustice clearly has been committed (e.g. a case where someone's rights to police protection from force have been violated).[10] So Hayek's opponents beg the question against him if they merely assert, without argument, that cases like this are cases of injustice, rather than just cases of cruelty, callousness, etc. Unfortunately, mere assertion is all they offer.

* * *

We see, then, that even those few objections in the literature that deal with Hayek's main objection to the notion of social justice fail to undermine that objection. Indeed, they fail even seriously to grapple with the central idea behind that objection, namely that justice or injustice presupposes some agent who can be said to be just or unjust, and that in the case of a market economy, there simply is no such agent. Given this circumstance, it is puzzling why so many seem to think that Hayek's case is either not worth refuting or is easily refuted. It is puzzling why, for example, Jeffrey Friedman should see fit, in introducing Lukes's piece on Hayek, to write that "Lukes carefully inspects [Hayek's] argument and then demolishes it" (1997, 4). For

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not only does Lukes *not* "demolish" Hayek's case against social justice, he barely addresses its central contention at all.

The same can be said of many of Hayek's other critics: Even the most sympathetic have, again, simply failed to address the main point. I think the reason for this is, partly, one I mentioned earlier: The advocates of social justice simply cannot believe that their most cherished ideals can be brought down through so simple an observation as that with which Hayek begins. But related to this is, I suspect, another implicit objection: It might be thought that Hayek, in arguing for the *incoherence* or *meaninglessness* of the notion of social justice, is implicitly appealing to some version of positivism, maybe something like a verificationist theory of meaning—a position which, though highly influential earlier in this century, has since fallen on hard times.

If this is the suspicion underlying the failure to address Hayek's central objection, it is misplaced. Claims of incoherence or meaninglessness by no means need presuppose any general and controversial theory of meaning (and Hayek does not appeal to one). We can know that it is incoherent to speak of a "round square" or (to take Hayek's example) a "moral stone" (1976, 78) without being committed to any such theory. Nor are plausible claims of incoherence limited to these rather uncontroversial cases. Consider Gilbert Ryle's famous illustration of his notion of a "category mistake," wherein he points out that it would be an error to suppose that there is something to a university over and above its students, faculty, physical facilities, etc. (1949, 16). To suppose that a university is something that exists over and above these things would clearly be to suppose something incoherent or meaningless; and this is something that a simple reflection on ordinary usage reveals. Hayek's point about justice is exactly parallel. It thus seems incorrect for Lukes to assert that Hayek's claim about the meaning of justice is merely a "stipulation" (1997, 71); it is no more a stipulation than Ryle's example is, and as we've seen, nothing Lukes says shows that Hayek is wrong.

But doesn't the fact that so many people use the expression "social justice" imply that it must have *some* coherent meaning? Not at all. Many beliefs are clearly incoherent, even though they are widespread: Probably millions of people believe both that God is immaterial and that he has a white flowing beard, even though a little reflection shows that nothing immaterial could have a beard. Sophisticated, quasi-philosophical ideas about God commonly coexist with crude

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anthropomorphic ones, even though it is clear when one thinks about it that many of these are incompatible. We might also consider the doctrine of the Trinity: Accepted by *billions* of people over nearly two millennia, it is nevertheless widely agreed even by believers that no one has shown how a coherent account of it can be given. It is, officially, a "mystery," and attempts to understand it inevitably collapse into some heresy or other. This has led many to conclude that there simply *is* no sense to be made of the doctrine, that it is a complete muddle; and I think we can hardly deny that this is, at the very least, a defensible position. (In any case, it would be absurd to accuse the skeptic about Trinitarianism of indefensibly rejecting the doctrine simply on the basis of a mere "stipulation.")

The doctrine of the Trinity is, arguably, accepted by millions, not because it is coherent, but because millions of people have a strong emotional attachment to ideas (that there is only one God, that Jesus is God, that the Father is God, and that Jesus is not identical to the father) that are (arguably) incompatible. Attached as they are to those ideas, they assume *some* coherent sense can be made of them—even though centuries of effort have failed to support this assumption. The ideal of social justice is, Hayek suggests, in the same boat. It is simply incoherent, but many have an emotional attachment to its component incompatible ideas and thus assume that, surely, there must be *some* sense to it. But page after page of ink spilt by Hayek's critics have failed utterly to support *this* assumption.

This analogy between social justice and the doctrine of the Trinity suggests one further point. The doctrine of the Trinity, no matter how strong the arguments for its incoherence, is unlikely to lose its hold on millions merely because of those arguments. Might not the same be said about the ideal of social justice? Indeed, one further criticism of Hayek has been, not that his case against social justice is mistaken, but that it is unacceptable in its consequences; that is, that the market economy, and civilization along with it, cannot survive unless the members of society believe that the distribution of wealth it produces is just—in other words, unless they believe, erroneously, that there is such a thing as social justice. This is a claim famously championed by Irving Kristol (1982), and echoed by some of the other critics we've mentioned (e.g. Gamble 1996, 46–49); and it is, in my view, the most serious and important of the objections made to Hayek's position.

Even if sound, this objection does not show that Hayek is wrong;

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rather, it shows that the consequences of his being right might be catastrophic. I am not convinced it is sound, but that is not something I will try to show here. My aim has been merely to try to show that Hayek *is* right; or at least, that his critics have failed to show otherwise. But the Hayekian can certainly not rest content with this. The next step must be seriously to grapple with the question of whether human beings are psychologically capable of accepting an order, however beneficial, which cannot legitimately be said to be just or unjust; of whether they can bear a world in which not only God, but even a semi-divinized "society," responsible for their well-being, is denied them. "On that question," Hayek tells us, "may rest the survival of our civilization" (1988, 140).

NOTES

1. Though the treatment of "social justice" and "distributive justice" as more or less synonymous is fairly common among writers on this subject, some may object that the category of social justice is broader than that of distributive justice. There is, no doubt, some truth to this, as is evidenced by the fact that among political activists, if not political theorists, many grievances having nothing particularly to do with the distribution of wealth are commonly put forward as demands for "social justice." But since the identification of social justice and distributive justice is fairly common, and, more importantly, since what Hayek has in mind in criticizing social justice just is distributive justice (1976, 63), I will continue to speak of them as synonymous. This will, of course, have no bearing on what follows, so long as it is kept in mind that by "social justice" we just mean distributive justice.
2. Though in fairness to other critics of Hayek, it should be noted that this particular author exhibits an uncommon degree of flippancy, as should be evident to any reader of his *Anti-libertarianism* (1994).
3. Lukes (1997) distinguishes *six* lines of criticism in Hayek's attack on social justice. In addition to the three I've noted, he claims that Hayek also criticizes social justice on the grounds that it is religious, self-contradictory, and ideological. But these points aren't really distinct from the three I've alluded to. To take the last first: Hayek does say that appeals to social justice tend often to spring, not from a genuine interest in justice, but from motives of self-interest (1976, 65, 67, 90, 97). But this can be said also of all sorts of legitimate moral principles, and Hayek doesn't present this as an *argument against* social justice (nor is it clear why Lukes thinks he does, since Hayek doesn't make nearly as big a deal of this point as Lukes implies). Nor does he himself describe the ethic of social justice as "ideological," a loaded term the Marxist connotations of which hardly bring to mind themes consonant with

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Hayekian thought. Hayek just isn't the sort of thinker who explains systems of belief in terms of the class interests (or whatever) they allegedly serve. Insofar as Hayek thinks that social justice is "self-contradictory," it is because, as Lukes notes, he argues that "social processes are impersonal while justice presupposes the deliberate agency of a person or persons" (Lukes 1997, 69), and, as we shall see, this is precisely his reason for saying that it is meaningless or incoherent. So this criticism is just part of the first one I mentioned. And though Hayek does say that the notion of social justice rests on a quasireligious anthropomorphism of society, this too, as we shall also see, is part of his first criticism. At any rate, it would be a distortion of his views to say baldly that "Hayek criticized social justice because it is (he claims) religious." Hayek does say that social justice rests on a kind of superstition, but he nowhere says or implies that all religious belief is superstitious, nor does he anywhere present or imply an argument to the effect that religion is bad or disreputable, that social justice is religious, and that, therefore, social justice is bad or disreputable. So Lukes's criticism of this alleged argument of Hayek as "in tension with the Burkean critique of Enlightenment-inspired scientism" to be found in Hayek's other work, and as unjustifiably dismissive of the treating of some values as "sacred" (Lukes 1997, 72), is directed at a straw man. Moreover, Hayek's acknowledgement in *The Fatal Conceit* (1988) of the positive value of some kinds of religious tradition (cited by Lukes himself, 1997, 72) supports the conclusion that Hayek *didn't*, after all, mean to imply that social justice was bad *because* it was religious, an interpretation for which there is no support in *The Mirage of Social Justice* anyway—a more charitable conclusion than the one Lukes draws (ibid.), namely that Hayek, in *The Fatal Conceit*, was simply contradicting his alleged earlier position.

4. Even Shearmur, who is not unsympathetic to Hayek's case, discounts the importance to that case of the idea that the notion of social justice as incoherent or meaningless (1996, 138). But it is clear that Hayek himself put great emphasis on it. Not only does he reiterate the idea again and again in *The Mirage of Social Justice*, but in one interview, when asked why he rejected the ideal of social justice, it was this argument alone that he rehearsed (Hazlett 1992).
5. For a concise statement of Hayek's account of the informational role played by prices in a market economy, see his "The Use of Knowledge in Society" (in Hayek 1948). For a brief summary of Mises's calculation argument against socialism and a discussion of the history of the debate over that argument, see Steele 1992.
6. This is not to overlook a problem that Hayek does not shirk from acknowledging, namely that many, especially those who do not succeed in the competition of the marketplace, may find it hard to accept the "distribution" that the blind process of the market results in if it is recognized that many of those "favored" by the distribution do not merit their success in a moral sense. This is an issue I will return to at the conclusion of this paper.
7. There is in fact one further line of criticism developed by Plant that I won't

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consider in detail here, since it is not really germane to any of the arguments against social justice we've looked at. That is the objection that Hayek cannot sustain his distinction between "freedom" and "ability" (Plant 1994, 170–74). Though Plant seems to think otherwise, I don't see how this issue—the old "negative liberty" versus "positive liberty" debate—bears on the issue of whether the arguments of Hayek I've summarized show that there can be no such thing as social justice; those arguments appear to work or not work whatever we say about the nature of liberty (This includes the argument about social justice leading to totalitarianism: no one, regardless of his position on negative versus positive liberty, would welcome the sorts of restrictions on freedom Hayek claims social justice threatens us with.) In any case, Plant's arguments seem to me weak: He argues that negative liberty is important to us only because it makes possible certain abilities to do things, and appears to conclude from this that there is no real distinction between freedom and ability (ibid., 171–72). But if A makes B possible, surely this presupposes that they *are* distinct. In any case, it *doesn't* follow that they *aren't* distinct: my parents made my education possible, but I am distinct from them.

8. As already discussed in note 3, Hayek does say that appeals to social justice often are motivated more by self-interest than a genuine interest in justice. But he never says that *all* appeals to social justice are like this; and, more to the point, this (obviously) doesn't amount to the claim that those who appeal to social justice out of self-interest *know* or *believe* that it is an ideal that cannot be realized and that must lead to totalitarianism.
9. Hayek *would* presumably grant that this knowledge would be possible under primitive conditions, in which human societies consist of small bands of individuals with intimate knowledge of one another's circumstances. Indeed, Hayek appears to believe that the predilection for thinking in terms of social justice derives from sentiments hard-wired into the species during its infancy, when such conditions were the norm; and he grants that socialism would in fact be feasible under such conditions (1976, 67). But in modern civilization, with its complex institutions and millions upon millions of members, such sentiments are misguided and pernicious, and the knowledge required to ensure a particular distribution or a socialist economic order is unattainable.
10. The sorts of cases Judith Jarvis Thomson appeals to in her well-known paper "A Defense of Abortion" (1971) also support Hayek against Plant. She argues that if a world-renowned violinist were dying and attached to you without your consent so as to keep him alive, it would not be unjust for you to unplug yourself from him even if it meant that he would die; and even if you needed to be attached to him only for a few moments, it would not be *unjust* for you to detach yourself, only (perhaps incredibly) callous, since he has no *right* to the use of your body. Similarly, the woman in Plant's example surely has no right to your help, even if it would be, for other reasons, immoral of you not to help her.

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David Johnston

IS THE IDEA OF SOCIAL JUSTICE MEANINGFUL?

ABSTRACT: *Hayek claimed that the idea of social justice is meaningless in a market economy because in that context, no identifiable agent intentionally brings about the distribution of wealth. But the assumption that the existence of injustice entails an identifiable agent of injustice is erroneous. Moreover, Hayek ignores the fact that in a market economy, the broad pattern of economic outcomes is foreseeable even if detailed, person-by-person outcomes are not. Hayek's rejection of the idea of social justice reveals a striking naïveté about his own ethical presuppositions.*

Friedrich von Hayek was a penetrating, occasionally brilliant, and often subtle social thinker who discovered or publicized a number of insights of great importance, many of which went unjustly neglected for many years by all but a narrow circle of his admirers. Like many other great social thinkers, he also made some major mistakes and, especially in his later years, clung tenaciously to views that were demonstrably erroneous. His significant contributions to social theory have sometimes been ill-served by his own extravagant rhetoric

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and by his defenders. Edward Feser's restatement of Hayek's attack on the idea of social justice is one such unfortunate defense.

Feser accurately summarizes the main points of Hayek's attack on the idea of social justice. As he points out, Hayek argued (1) that the very idea of social justice is meaningless in the context of a market economy; (2) that any attempt to achieve social justice is bound to fail; and (3) that any attempt fully and consistently to attain social justice must inevitably lead to totalitarianism (Feser 1997, 583). Feser rightly points out that most of Hayek's critics have focused on the second and third of these claims, neglecting the first. Feser supports all three propositions vigorously, but his defense focuses on Hayek's first claim, that the idea of social justice is meaningless. According to Feser, this argument is "the most important and devastating" of the three (ibid.).

About Hayek's second and third arguments I shall offer only two observations in rejoinder to Feser, since I have discussed these arguments in these pages before (Johnston 1997) and since Feser gives them only desultory attention in his reply to Lukes and me. First, Feser defends Hayek's second and third arguments by assuming an exaggerated, unjustifiably perfectionist understanding of the goals of social justice. If the standard of success for an effort to achieve social justice is a state of perfect and complete substantive equality[1] and every state of affairs that falls short of that standard is defined as a failure, then it is true that any attempt to achieve social justice will inevitably fail. However, by this standard *any* social objective would be subject to Hayek's objection. For example, if for an effort to fight crime we define "success" as the perfect and complete elimination of crime and consider any state of affairs that falls short of that standard to be a failure, then any attempt to fight crime will inevitably fail. Similarly, any attempt *fully and consistently* to eliminate crime would probably lead to a police state—just as, arguably, any attempt fully and consistently to attain social justice (defined as a state of perfect and complete equality) would lead to totalitarianism. The sensible conclusion about fighting crime is that we should be interested in reducing the frequency of crime to the lowest feasible level consistent with other objectives we deem valuable, such as the avoidance of a police state. It is *not* that we should abandon the project of fighting crime. Similarly, the sensible conclusion about social justice is that we should be interested in reducing social injustice to the lowest feasible level

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consistent with other valuable objectives. It is not that we should abandon the goal of social justice.

Second, I have no quarrel with Hayek's claim that any attempt to achieve social justice *by turning an entire society into an organization* (in Hayek's sense) devoted to the attainment of that aim would be likely to have the unfortunate consequences Hayek predicts, particularly if the goal of social justice is defined in the perfectionist sense on which Feser insists. It is worth noting, however, that Hayek's assumption that social justice could be achieved *only* by such means is unfounded (and entirely undefended by Hayek and Feser). In real life, many social goals are pursued with some success, though perhaps never with perfect success, by a variety of means, some of which involve organizations of the Hayekian type while others do not. The fact that neither Hayek nor Feser ever considers the possibility that the aim of social justice could be pursued by any means other than the creation of an all-embracing, society-wide organization may be understandable in light of the catastrophic twentieth-century experience of socialist command economies, but it is nonetheless indicative of the poverty of their social imaginations.

Once one understands that the appropriate object of Hayek's claims about the inevitable failure and totalitarian tendencies of efforts to achieve social justice is the well-known but misconceived *strategy* that was pursued in many command economies rather than the *goal* of social justice itself, it may seem reasonable to focus, as Feser does, on Hayek's first argument against social justice, to which I now turn.

What reasons do Hayek and Feser offer to support the claim that the idea of social justice is meaningless in the context of a market economy? Hayek's principal argument, which Feser summarizes concisely, is that a distribution can be just or unjust only if some agent "intentionally and with foresight" brings that distribution about. Yet in a market economy, no such agent exists, and the distribution of wealth is an outcome of impersonal processes the results of which are foreseen by no one. In such a setting it makes no sense to speak of a just or unjust distribution of wealth. Hence in a market economy the idea of social justice is otiose (Hayek 1976, 67–70; Feser 1997, 583).

Two questions about this argument are worth asking. First, is it true that a state of affairs can be just or unjust only if some agent intentionally and with foresight brings that state of affairs about? Sec-

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ond, is it true that in a market economy the distribution of wealth is neither deliberately brought about nor foreseen by anyone?

The reason for the assumption that a state of affairs can be just or unjust only if some agent intentionally and with foresight brings it about appears to be that only in case this condition is met can an identifiable agent be held responsible for the justice or injustice. We commonly distinguish between *injustice* and *misfortune* and treat the latter as accidental while ascribing responsibility for the former. However, in many instances of injustice no such ascription of responsibility can be made. Suppose that a man is wrongfully convicted of murder, in a trial in which all parties, including prosecution attorneys, defense attorneys, witnesses, the presiding judge, and the members of the jury acted in accordance with proper legal procedures and in good faith, just because crucial exculpatory evidence never came to light. We might describe the man's conviction as the result of an accident in which no one could reasonably be accused of a wrongful or unjust action, but the conviction would still be an injustice.

Of course, in this case a set of identifiable agents brought about the resulting injustice. But they did not intentionally and with foresight wrongfully convict an innocent man, and those agents cannot be held responsible for committing an injustice, as they could be if they had deliberately convicted an innocent man, even though an injustice has occurred. In general, then, it is not always true that a state of affairs can be just or unjust only if some agent intentionally and with foresight brings that state of affairs about.

Similarly, Hayek's assumption that in a market economy the distribution of wealth is neither deliberately brought about nor foreseen by anyone is misleading. It is true that in a market economy the detailed, person-by-person distribution of wealth is neither deliberately brought about nor foreseen by anyone. However, legislators, central bankers, other public officials, and other, unofficial observers can usually predict the overall distributive consequences of legislation and major non-legislative actions with reasonable, though not perfect, accuracy, and often officials are in a position to bring about such consequences.

The general point that is overlooked in Hayek's argument is that while detailed, person-by-person outcomes in a market economy are not the products of an overall design, the broad pattern of these outcomes often *is* a predictable consequence of a legal framework that is itself (or can be) a product of such a design. So Hayek's argument that

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in a market economy the distribution of wealth is neither deliberately brought about nor foreseen by anyone, while partly true, is also largely false. Hayek's principal arguments in support of his claim about the meaninglessness of social justice fail.

Hayek's charge that in a market economy no agent exists that can be charged with responsibility for achieving social justice is not the only weapon in his arsenal. He also points out, in a highly cogent argument that Feser echoes, that no generally agreed-upon standards of desert, need, or merit exist. Since most advocates of social justice assume that wealth (and income, and other goods) should be distributed in accordance with some standard of desert or need or the like, the fact that no such standard is generally accepted poses a serious difficulty for the idea of social justice. It might even be argued that the absence of such accepted standards renders the idea of social justice meaningless.

This argument would be misconceived. We do not have to *agree* on an idea of social justice for such an idea to be meaningful. However, it is true that if no agreement on standards of social justice exists, then any particular standard that prevails in a society's basic institutions will necessarily be *imposed* on those who disagree with it. This fact is far less adequately recognized by advocates of social justice than many of them are aware.[2] Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that the same thing could be said of many social measures other than attempts to achieve social justice. For example, any effort to prevent crimes and to enforce criminal laws would be experienced as an imposition not only by "ordinary" criminals, but also by citizens who conscientiously object to particular statutes and legal sanctions with which they disagree. Advocates of social justice have often blithely ignored the impositional character of their recommendations, but the fact of the matter is that *every* social objective, from the most rudimentary goals of crime prevention and defense to the most exotic promotion of the arts, is subject to disagreement among citizens. The impositional character of legal rules cannot be escaped, and the rules that might be adopted with the purpose of promoting social justice do not differ significantly in this regard from other rules.

The largest question that is raised by Hayek's attack on the meaningfulness of the idea of social justice is whether it is possible for human beings to influence and to evaluate the vast institutional structures that shape outcomes in modern societies at all. If the answer to this question is no, then surely we should consider ourselves absolved

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from all responsibility for considering whether or not our fellow human beings are dealt with fairly within our common political and social arrangements. Hayek so often and forcefully emphasizes the remoteness of the innumerable individual decisions that are made in modern societies from the outcomes to which those decisions ultimately lead that it would be easy to suppose that he is in agreement with this line of argument. Yet this supposition would be dramatically incorrect. Hayek was clearly committed to the view that human beings can rationally evaluate and influence their political and social arrangements. This commitment was the premise of *The Road to Serfdom*, the book that established his reputation as a social theorist, and Hayek remained unwavering in his fidelity to it until the end of his life. Hayek did not believe that we can make meaningful sense of the idea of social justice in the context of a market society (though as Feser acknowledges, he did believe that we can make sense of that idea in the context of a command economy), but he did believe that we can evaluate alternative political and social arrangements and make rational choices between (among other things) market economies and socialist command economies by some standard.

The question is: On what grounds (or by reference to what standard) should we make this choice? Hayek is notoriously evasive about this question, and Feser's rehash of Hayek's view does not improve matters. As Feser acknowledges (1997, 586), Hayek suggests that the imposition of a socialist order might be criticized on moral grounds because of the restrictions on personal freedom it would entail. According to Feser, however, "Hayek does not pursue this theme. Rather, he argues that the attempted realization of social justice . . . will bring about results far worse than the circumstances the advocate of social justice wants to alleviate" (ibid.).

By what standard would these results be "far worse"? To this question neither Hayek nor Feser seems much inclined to offer an answer. Feser acknowledges that when pushed, Hayek often supported his defense of the market order by arguing that it is "the system most likely to satisfy the wants of the greatest number of people to the greatest possible extent" (1997, 595; cf. Johnston 1997, 87). Although Feser denies that the ethical basis of Hayek's defense is utilitarianism, his own account of that basis rightly portrays Hayek as a desire-satisfaction (or preference-satisfaction) utilitarian of some sort.[3]

As everyone who is familiar with the major views in normative political philosophy over the past 50 years is aware, claims about the basis

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on which we should evaluate alternative political and social arrangements are enormously controversial. A number of utilitarian or neo-utilitarian thinkers have argued, as Hayek does, that the only factor relevant to such an evaluation is whether a given set of arrangements would *maximize* the satisfaction of desires taken as an aggregate. However, many thinkers have offered powerful arguments against this view. Among the strong alternatives to it is the view that the only factor relevant to such an evaluation is whether the arrangements being considered would *equalize* the satisfaction of desires among the members of a society. It was in light of this controversy that I concluded, in an argument that Feser utterly fails to comprehend, that an "egalitarian distribution of wealth is as 'open' or 'purposeless' a goal . . . as the goal of maximizing aggregate wealth" (Johnston 1997, 88).[4]

Whether Hayek's defense of the market order is a defense based on *justice* is, in this context, a verbal quibble. The fact is that Hayek defended the market order on the basis of an ethical view that is highly controversial, regardless of whether or not Hayek recognized the disputable character of his own ethical claims. Hayek was able to pretend otherwise, and thus to assume the evident superiority of the market order and the absurdity of the idea of social justice, only because of his apparent naïveté about his own ethical presuppositions. No powerful defense of Hayek's claims about social justice can be mounted without confronting this extraordinary lacuna in his intellectual repertoire. It is unlikely, in fact, that any powerful defense of Hayek's claim that the idea of social justice is meaningless can be mounted at all.

NOTES

1. The notion of substantive equality can be defined in a variety of ways, among which in the recent literature the most prominent are equality of welfare, equality of resources, and equality of capabilities. For some discussion of the first two conceptions, see Dworkin 1981 and Rawls 1971 and 1982; for discussion of the third see Sen 1980 and 1992.
2. Donald Moon (1994) explores this theme with great insight and sensitivity.
3. Feser does not seem to be aware that the term "utilitarianism" nowadays usually refers to desire-satisfaction utilitarianism, not to the classical utilitarianism of Bentham, which focused on the maximization of pleasures and the minimization of pains. For one informative account of modern utilitarianism, see Griffin 1986.

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4. Feser erroneously says that this claim is "almost entirely undefended" (1997, 592), ignoring several pages of argument that precede it.

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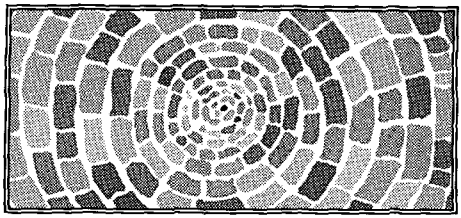

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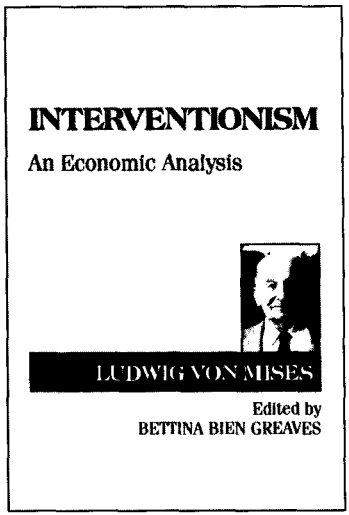

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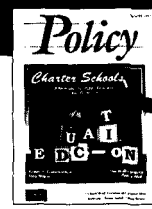

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